LABOUR REVIEW

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Labour & Leadership

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Labour and Leadership

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THE resignation of Thorneycroft and his colleagues from the Treasury opens a new stage in the Tory offensive against organized Labour. Since the British Motor Corporation strike in the summer of 1956 the offensive has followed a generally consistent course, though with twists and turns; just as a river, though bending, flows always the same way. In 1956 the Government and the employers set out to test the strength of the unions as a prelude to a harsher wages policy, which they hoped would lead to unemployment and a universal reduction in the standard of living. Heartened by the treachery of the Right-wing trade union leaders and of the Communist Party leaders, they forced matters to a head with the engineers in 1957:[1] but the danger of a premature show-down, which would have found the Tories politically unprepared, made necessary an interim slowing down of their offensive. The engineers received wage increases, but at a price which included a standstill agreement separating them from the 1958 wages fight of several major sections, notably busmen, railwaymen and miners. The Tories, too, paid a price, but it was part of their strategy of seeking the best ways to fight the trade unions. The attack against rank-and-file workshop organization continued. John McLoughlin was successfully victimized at Briggs; this was all the more encouraging to the Tories, since the Communist Party was in the leadership of the shop stewards in the factory and on the area bodies of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Then came the Covent Garden strike, and Mr Frank Cousins revealed that when it came to a show-down his Left talk gave way to Deakinism in deeds. During the summer of 1957 the economic situation grew worse. All those reformists who hailed the engineers' increase as a sign that the 'moderate policies' of Macmillan had prevailed were rudely shocked by the 7 per cent. Bank Rate. The stage was now set for unemployment, which in turn would strengthen the Tories' efforts to get to grips with organized Labour.

IT is important to understand that the Tory leaders and the employers they represent have to make adjustments, not only to their plans for industrial struggle but to their political policies as well. The basic, incontrovertible fact from which our analysis must flow is that the employers have made a decision to fight Labour. For the past twenty-one months there has been no fundamental retreat from this decision: yet its political implications have been constantly under review by the Cabinet. Now the present Government can remain in power until 1959. It has a working majority and one of the weakest-led Labour Oppositions in history. However, even the most dim-witted Tory MP (and by no means all of them are dim-witted) must realize that the stage is now set for a full-scale conflict with the working class, and that if such conflict is carried to its logical end while the Tories remain in office it can lead to a radicalization of the Labour Party to a point where far-reaching nationalization and other policies could be forced on a new Labour government —despite Gaitskell and Co.

LABOUR'S coming to power in an atmosphere of class warfare could have very serious consequences for British imperialism. The Right-wing faction is far from strong enough to act as a satisfactory reformist buffer in such a contingency. Consisting almost entirely of public school careerists, it has no real experience of working-class movements and working-class struggle, unlike the old Right wing of Attlee, Bevin, Morrison, Dalton and Co., who gained their experience during the struggles of the twenties and thirties. In the defeat of the 1926 General Strike Stanley Baldwin drove home the lessons of what might be called the unwritten 'Master and Servant Act' which governs the conduct of Right-wing reformists, and the Attlee generation never forgot these lessons. They skilfully combined a grip on the unions with the most treacherous Parliamentary politics. They feared coming into office with a majority, and so without an alibi, for should this happen, it might quickly lead to their exposure. That is why they were by no means enthusiastic about the 1945 General Election victory. History now records that the post-war replacement boom and the arms drive, while in the main sheltering them from large-scale exposure, nevertheless seriously weakened their political prestige, especially on such questions as the consolidaton of the nationalized industries. A debate on the real meaning of socialist policy has continued in the Labour movement ever since.

[1]See Robert Shaw, 'The Engineers' Strike and the Labour Movement', **Labour Review**, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 76-81, May-June 1957.

THE Brighton conference did not settle this debate. Gaitskell and his 'new men' came to an unstable compromise with the trade union leaders. There was agreement on vague double-talk resolutions. The leaders of the big unions, worried about the Tory offensive, see a Labour government as the only alternative. This, they feel, would give them an opportunity to call for sacrifices from their members under conditions where the edge of class conflict could be blunted. Gaitskell's faction consists of several ambitious careerists who chafe at waiting too long for the Ministerial plums. The limousines, the palace junketings with Scotland Yard watching over their personal safety:[2] this, to these little men, is power. Having scarcely any experience in the class struggle they mark time advocating policies which mean all things to all men, but which commit them to nothing fundamental when they take office. Many of them sincerely believe that they can make capitalism work more efficiently than their Tory counterparts can. So at Brighton they joined forces with the trade union chiefs. Both sides were motivated by opportunist considerations. Both sides feared more than anything else a head-on class collision with the Tories. Brighton was a demonstration of a frightened reformist leadership running away from reality and at the same time feeling too weak to defy the rank and file completely by throwing the principle of nationalization overboard altogether. The conference decisions, though vague, do still allow the movement to work out a specific and practical nationalization policy that would constitute a substantial threat to British capitalism. That the employers are keenly aware of this danger can be seen from the statement of Mr Ian D. Lyle at the Annual General Meeting of Tate and Lyle Ltd. Speaking about Labour Party policy he said:

> There have been some industries named in the official list of those destined to be nationalized outright. Without a doubt they will know how to react to a direct threat of this nature. Indeed we already have most heartening evidence of the determination of certain sections of the steel industry to defend themselves against nationalization.

Regardless of this example of upper-class arrogance, events are more and more compelling the movement to fight for the extension of nationalization.

MACMILLAN'S Government is unable to defeat the British working class in a clear-cut life and death struggle. It contains some skilful strategists; but it is constantly in a crisis of one kind or another —crises which reflect the chronic, insoluble crisis of British imperialism. On what then does this Government rely? On what is its unquestionable (and, to the superficial observer, remarkable) inner confidence based? For decades the employing class has utilized the Right-wing Labour leaders as a means of demoralizing the workers and bringing them to heel. This is still the case. The weapon up the Tories' sleeve is the Right wing of the Labour Party and the trade unions. The Government is determined to continue its offensive against the working class. It is cheered on by the indecision of Gaitskell and his friends; the result of the Leicester by-election serves to emphasize that the do-nothing attitude of the Right wing is already holding back and confusing large sections of the working class.

SINCE Brighton the Government's economic difficulties have been rendered more acute by the serious trade recession in the USA. Apart from purely secondary considerations of timing there is no difference between Macmillan and Thorneycroft on the economic measures needed to meet this situation. The Government is pleased that its policies over the past year have reduced wages by £75 million while at the same time it has persuaded the Right wing of the TUC to recognize and discuss with its 'three wise men' economic sub-committee. The purpose of this committee is to keep the Labour leaders talking while the employers are on the attack. The TUC leaders are content to take part in this class collaboration talking-shop because it provides them with an excuse for not giving leadership to the Labour movement. Why, for instance, has not the TUC called a conference of all trade unions with wage demands, in order to work out a common industrial strategy to defeat the employers? Instead it permits individual unions to drift unprepared into a fight with the employers. Such sectional struggles court disaster and can lead to serious demoralization in the event of defeats. Why has the National Council of Labour not organized a joint emergency conference of the three parts of the Labour movement to ensure a united struggle to help the unions with wage demands? The rank and file of the movement must press for these actions to be taken now. The Right wing of the TUC must stop talking with the enemy and organize the fight against them; if they will not do this they must make way for those who will. The need to fight is obvious. If wage increases were out of the question in Tory eyes in 1957 they are out of the question in 1958, although it is not excluded that here and there certain tactical awards may be made in order to divide the unions. If the National Health Service was considered ripe for pruning in 1957 its future is certainly no brighter in 1958. We are led to believe that the differences between the Prime Minister and the ex-Chancellor are differences between 'soft' and 'hard' policies on economic measures. This view suits the reformist leaders, who like to think in terms of 'moderate' Tory governments: but it is a dangerous illusion. Macmillan and Thorneycroft are agreed that the economic situation is more serious now than when the Bank Rate was raised to 7 per cent. but there are political differences between them on how this situation should be faced. Thorneycroft felt that strong measures must be taken in the immediate future. Macmillan and his supporters believe that a serious effort must be made soon to cope on the political plane with the inevitable effects of the struggle to reduce living standards. They feel that Thorneycroft's policy could well do irreparable damage to the Tory Party's electoral prestige. While they cannot avoid loss of support altogether they naturally want to reduce it to a minimum. Macmillan's policy is a short-term one. It seems to indicate that the possibility of an early general election is being considered among the Tory leaders. The way Fleet Street is building up Macmillan and Butler as the watchdogs faithfully de-

[2] A familiar sight at Labour Party conferences during the last Labour Government was the Special Branch men, complete with red ties, mingling with the delegates as part of their duty of guarding Labour Ministers.

fending the Health Service rings suspiciously like pre-election propaganda. Thorneycroft is being branded—and explained away—as a die-hard Right-winger, fighting tooth and nail to reduce living standards, with the Macmillan wing taking a moderate stand. The Tory strategists could fake a 'save the pound' election campaign. They could play upon the conflict with Thorneycroft—and at the same time, in the event of a bus strike or railway strike, they would denounce the 'wild men' on the Left. If the Tories did not win a majority at the polls they might nevertheless, thanks to the Labour Right wing's lack of policy and refusal to struggle, retain enough seats to command a strong position in Parliament. A Right-wing Labour government with a small majority and without a socialist policy would immediately have to face the full effects of Tory economic policy under conditions in which it would be extremely difficult for it to escape pressure and anger from the Right and the Left. It would find survival difficult. Thus the conditions could be created for the formation of a 'National' government 'to save the pound' and 'to save the nation'. Whether they like it or not the Gaitskell leadership are step by step paving the way for such an eventuality. The April budget could be rigged to build up election propaganda, leaving an autumn budget to deal the real blows. An early general election would suit the immediate policies of the Right-wing trade union leaders who are faced with strike decisions by their members; they would be able to appeal for the postponement of decisions until after the election, on the ground that a Labour government would make the hardships of a strike unnecessary. Thus the Macmillan-Thorneycroft rift could turn out to be the preparation of a political trap for the Labour movement. A Right-wing Labour government without a socialist policy could do nothing but sow demoralization and help the Tories. The generation that has come into political life since the end of the second world war should study 'the greatest betrayal in the political history of this country',[3] the defection of J. Ramsay MacDonald. Such a betrayal could happen again.

BUT it need not happen again, provided that socialists face up to the class struggles forced upon the movement by the employers' offensive, provided they fight back with energy, determination and *élan*. A comprehensive inter-union strike strategy which would treat each strike as part of a general struggle, and mobilize the full force of organized Labour to defeat the employers, is absolutely imperative. Such strategy could be devised by the shop stewards' committees and the militants of the various unions in a short time. One successful strike, even a small one, is worth a dozen Parliamentary debates with the Tories. Inter-union rank-and-file organization is a vital part of the answer to the Tory offensive. It is not the complete answer, however. We have entered a period when industrial struggle cannot but lead to political action, by its own inner logic; more and more do workers, in challenging their employers, challenge thereby also the political leadership of those employers, the Tory Government and the State apparatus. Whenever a strike takes place ward and constituency Labour Parties must be drawn into the struggle, particularly in the area of the strike. The strike weapon and the electoral fight are two sides of the same coin. In certain situations the two can and should be combined. Such a strategy will open the way for the development of socialist policies within the Labour Party—the demand for the nationalization of the engineering, shipbuilding, motor car and chemical industries, for instance, a demand whose adoption would be a real step forward.

WHAT are the tasks and prospects before Marxists in this situation that is pregnant both with danger and with promise? To answer this question we must examine, if only briefly, the last remaining stronghold in Britain of that pernicious pseudo-Marxism which for too long has stunted the growth of a revolutionary movement in this country. We refer to the Communist Party. Elsewhere in this issue will be found a valuable and scholarly study of the first days of that party, showing how Stalinism fastened its grip on it. Today we stand at the latter end of the process, when two years of crisis have revealed the theoretical decay and practical bankruptcy of Stalinism and drained the party of many of its honest members, leaving (at the top) no more than a stagnant pool. Stagnant pools can be virulent, however; and all who desire to see the construction of a real Marxist leadership have the duty of making sure that Stalinism never again canalizes the hopes and energies of British militants. It is currently making desperate efforts to do so. It is doing its best to present a Left face to the workers, and to a membership of whom many are still critical or sceptical. King Street has launched campaigns against rocket bases and pledged support for workers on strike. But these campaigns do not offer a sound socialist strategy for smashing the Tory Government and for rallying the rank and file of the Labour Party to fight for socialist policies. Verbal opposition to the construction of rocket bases can be so much hot air unless it is linked with class action against the Government and the employers. A successful strike is a blow against rocket bases, even though its immediate aim is a struggle against redundancy. Yet when the Aberdeen plumbers decided not to work on rocket bases the *Daily Worker* merely gave this prominence as a news item, failing, however, to draw any general conclusions. Yet if organized Labour followed the example of the Aberdeen men how could rocket sites be built? No one wants trade unions which are led by or influenced by members of the Communist Party to embark on adventures; but why did the Electrical Trades Union, for instance, not demand that the Trades Union Congress support the Aberdeen plumbers? Why did the *Daily Worker* not call on trade unionists to give their full support? Though an invitation is extended to the TUC and Labour Party leaders to participate in the *Daily Worker* birthday rally, this courtesy is not, significantly enough, offered to the editor and staff of the Left-wing Labour organ *Tribune*; though this would seem to be an obvious gesture if unity of the militant workers' Press be one of the aims of the rally. At the same time as thousands of militants are beginning to find themselves in active opposition to the Right wing the Communist Party, a

[3] C. R. Attlee, **As It Happened** (1954), p. 74.

political spinster of nearly forty summers, makes these coy overtures to the Right wing!

THERE are still inside the Communist Party a considerable number of workers who have yet to see that their party's industrial policy is not based on winning victories and exposing the Right wing in industrial and political struggles. It is a policy which is designed to capture 'key positions' inside trade unions; and at times this leads to the formation of sordid alliances with careerists who will join with anybody in order to better their positions. It is an opportunist policy, which avoids a serious struggle against the Right wing, and which, despite Left-sounding words, leaves the workers without real leadership. In the fight against sackings the Communist Party demands consultation but is silent on the demand for a four-day week, which would keep the employed and unemployed united. Yet workers who have taken part in a redundancy strike know that consultation, while necessary, may be tantamount to unemployment by common consent of employers and unions if it is presented as the object for which the struggle is fought. (What good did the much-trumpeted agreement which ended the Tube Investment strike do for the eighty unfortunates who were as much out of a job when the strike ended as when it began?) Today the industrial struggle is the spearhead of the political fight against war; the Communist Party leaders, who refuse to recognize this, in practice stand in the same camp as the Right wing, despite all their talk about 'peace'. This, no doubt, is why they seek to stand on a common platform with the Right wing at the Albert Hall. In practice the Communist Party cannot fight the Right wing; its policies prevent this. An industrial member of the party cannot explain away the shame of Hungary and the crimes of Stalin. The Soviet leaders demand peaceful coexistence with the imperialists; therefore an all-out effort to expose the Right wing, who uphold the principle of collaboration with the imperialists, is out of the question for the Communist Party. How can it 'peacefully coexist' unless it at least maintains the status quo with the reformists? That is why the King Street hullabaloo about the Right wing amounts to nothing.

THE continued existence of the Communist Party prevents its members, however active many of them may be in their trade unions, from joining the Labour Party and fighting within its Left wing for the ending of the present Right-wing domination of the party. The Communist Party leaders are quick to claim that the Right wing is so strong that the Labour Left has been smashed to pieces and that there can be no Left and no mass movement without the leadership of the Communist Party. This is an excuse for not entering the fight. The Communist Party is utterly discredited Its role henceforward is to act as a less and less effective barrier to the flowering of the real, Marxist-led, revolutionary movement that will guide the British working class to socialism. The King Street leaders can never provide Marxist leadership, because this would mean, in effect, repudiating their own past—witness in this respect the crisis of the party's History Commission. A party which is unable to discuss its past mistakes can never be a Marxist party, because Marxism is a science based on the truthful treatment of facts. And this party has no future, unless the sterile antics and vaporings of a sect can be called a future. But it is incontestable that many of its members desire to fight as real communists. The time has come when they should openly demand and fight for the disbanding of the Communist Party and the entry of its members into the Labour Party. For it is in the course of the coming struggles within the Labour Party that the Marxist leadership will take shape. Many former leading members of the Communist Party are already making valuable contributions towards this end. Joining the Labour Party to fight for Marxism has nothing whatever in common with liquidation and revisionism, which mean the repudiation of Marxism and the policies which flow from a Marxist analysis. Since the day-to-day experiences of the working class are continuously vindicating Marxism, enough Marxists active inside the Labour Party and the unions would be able to gain powerful support from the rank and file of that party; this in turn would make it extremely difficult for the Right wing to expel people. There is no reason why, in the course of struggle with the Right wing, a new Marxist society could not be legalized within the Labour Party in just the same way as the Fabian Society. The Labour Party is not the private property of Transport House and the Fabians. Its rank and file can be won, on an increasing scale, for Marxist ideas.

IT is when it is merged with the living day-to-day struggles of the workers in their organizations that Marxist theory becomes a real guide to action, a fertilizing, invigorating material force. For British Marxists in this fateful New Year of 1958 there is no more urgent task than to link the militant industrial struggle in the pits and workshops and on the building sites with the militant political struggle in the Labour Party, against reformist policies and Right-wing leadership, for socialist policies and socialist leadership. The combination of these struggles in one united drive forward against the ruling class would do more than anything else to halt their offensive and inflict shattering, sweeping and decisive blows on them. The best possible contribution that serious militants in the Communist Party can make to the fulfilment of this great aim is to fight inside the Communist Party for the disbanding of that party, so that its members can strengthen the work of those who are building a Marxist movement in the trade unions and Labour Party.

The Dockers and Trade Union Democracy

William Hunter

BETWEEN September 1954 and May 1955 ten thousand men left the Transport and General Workers' Union and joined the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers. This 'walk-out' involved approximately 40 per cent. of the dock workers in Liverpool, Birkenhead, Manchester and Hull.

The scale of this union transfer proved that here was no artificial and isolated adventure by a handful of men acting on impulse. It came about in conditions which have made the post-war history of the British dockers more stormy than that of any other section of the working class.

During the ten years preceding this large-scale recruitment to the 'blue union' there were at least six major dock strikes. In these struggles pressure was building up inside the TGWU, to which the overwhelming majority of dockers belonged, and the 1954-55 break with this union has to be seen in the context of these strikes and of daily life on the docks.

THE DOCK LABOUR SCHEME

It is well known that dockers' wages and conditions of work have improved somewhat since the great strike for the 'Dockers' Tanner' at the end of the nineteenth century and the organization of portworkers which won that victory. Again, since the second world war the dockers have been better off in many respects than in the pre-war days of casual labour and unemployment. The Dock Labour Scheme[1] abolished some of the worst features of casual labouring on the docks.

Nevertheless the dock worker is by no means living in a workers' paradise. The dockers' millennium has not yet arrived. Government officials, trade union leaders, learned sociologists, all those gentlemen who have put the dock workers under the microscope (in the years since the war the dockers have been subjected to more 'learned' inquiries than any other section of the British working class) have all tended to assume that the Dock Labour Scheme has raised the status of the dockers from the most depressed industrial workers to the most privileged, well-paid and even coddled of trades. But it is necessary to brush away the slush and to assess the Dock Labour Scheme in its true light and examine closely the real conditions in the trade which have existed since the end of the war. We must examine the real relations between the employers and the dock workers.

With the post-war expansion of trade and almost negligible unemployment in the country as a whole, the docker was in a much stronger position than before the war to press home his demands for an improvement in pay and conditions. During the war it had been found necessary to abolish the system of casual hiring of dock labour and it would certainly not have been possible to return to casual labour after the war. 'Fall-back' pay and its accompanying indirect control of labour under the Dock Labour Scheme was a price the employers had to pay for preventing the full realization of the dockers' aims. Thus the Dock Labour Board's disciplinary powers have been used to compel workers to do particular jobs and to accept conditions of work which were formerly accepted only under the threat of unemployment. Compulsory overtime, for example, is a burning, unresolved issue on the docks and has been sustained only through the threat of suspension and other penalties which the employers are empowered to impose under the scheme. However it would not be true to say that the dockers oppose the Dock Labour Scheme. Dock workers are most resolute in the maintenance of 'decasualization' and often their demands have been concentrated on improving the scheme. On Merseyside, for instance, the dockers have complained that employers have in many cases broken the provisions of the scheme in employing non-registered workers.

Nevertheless, seen in relation to the power which the dockers have had since the end of the war, the scheme has helped the employers to maintain 'discipline', to maintain their grip on labour during a period of trade expansion.

THE TRANSPORT AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION

Most important in any study of conditions which gave rise to the 'blue union' movement in the northern ports is a consideration of the position occupied by the Transport and General Workers' Union in the scheme. Already before the war, a gulf existed between the bureaucracy which ran the TGWU and the rank and file of the union. In the Dock Section of the union, the power of the bureaucrats was strengthened through the Dock Labour Scheme, for under it TGWU officials sat on boards which disciplined the men. Militant trade unionists who kicked against working conditions quickly found that they had to fight not only the employers but also their own union representatives. Union officials thus had almost complete power inside the union and now had the power to deprive men of their livelihood. The worker who was active in opposing the bureaucratic policies inside the union now had other official powers ranged against him.

The union bureaucracy was also strengthened by the way in which the scheme was used to guarantee contributions to the TGWU. On Merseyside and in Manchester registration books (without which no docker can be accepted for work) were issued only on production of a clear TGWU card. Thus the union was

[1] Dock Workers' (Regulation of Employment) Scheme, 1947. The scheme is administered by a National Dock Labour Board and local boards consisting of equal numbers of 'persons representing dock workers in the port and of persons representing the employers of such dock workers'. The boards are responsible for keeping registers of employers and men; as agents of the employers they pay wages due and are responsible for disciplining workers. Dock employers pay a levy to cover the cost of operating the scheme.

guaranteed its members no matter how little activity was carried on in their interests. The vast majority of dockers in these two cities stamped up their union cards only at the six-monthly intervals when the registration books were issued. They looked on the union not as an organization for the defence and betterment of their conditions but as an 'overhead charge' for the maintenance of their job. The official could ignore the worker's dissatisfaction with the way the union was behaving, secure in the knowledge that union dues would still be paid each April and October.

The TGWU official machine was quite generally detested by the dockers. Officials made agreements with the employers behind the backs of the men. Men were disciplined with the consent of union officials and often saved only by 'unofficial' strike action.

A group of students who investigated conditions on Manchester docks in 1950-51 reported: 'There is no doubt that there is widespread dissatisfaction with their union among dock workers in Manchester. Relations with the union were criticized more than any other aspect of employment.'[2] In their interviews these investigators heard repeated often a story which summed up the attitude of the full-time union officials, who, of course, are not elected by union members but appointed by the union leadership. One official, it seems, informed the dockers at a branch meeting that he did not care what they thought about him. He had himself and his job to think of first and if he had to choose between being popular with them or standing in well with the high officials, he would not hesitate to choose the latter.

Most of the leaders of the mass resignations from the TGWU to join the 'blue union' had been members of the TGWU for many years. There were ex-branch committee men and ex-lay officers among them, and all had put up a prolonged fight inside the union against the officers. But, secure in their appointments, the officials could afford to ignore the demands of the rank-and-file members, to ignore votes of censure and votes of no confidence. Thus rank-and-file dockers who sought to further the interests of the men with traditional militancy and solidarity continually collided with the bureaucratic apparatus of the TGWU. The desire for a national, democratic portworkers' union in these conditions inevitably grew and matured.

Ever since the war real working-class leadership on the docks has been in the hands of unofficial committees which sprang up in every dispute. In every major strike, too, one section of the workers had proposed a break from the TGWU. But always the leaders of the unofficial committees put forward the alternative of transforming relations inside the TGWU and wresting democratic rights from the entrenched union apparatus. Finally however, in 1954, in the words of one rank-and-file leader, the bankruptcy of this policy of staying in the TGWU became clear and led to the 'biggest prison break in all history'.

THE 'PRISON BREAK'

The 'prison break' first began in Hull, at the end of August 1954. Four thousand Hull dockers had come out on strike on August 16 against an antiquated and dangerous method of unloading grain known as 'hand-scuttling'. Men had to stand up to their waists and deeper in loose grain in the hold of a ship and shovel grain into sacks with big metal scoops. Even the secretary of the National Dock Group of the TGWU described hand-scuttling as 'a rotten, dirty, underpaid job that should have died with Queen Victoria'. To be sure, his statement was made after the strike had been on for six days and after his union's attempt to break the strike had signally failed. The TGWU had actually tolerated hand-scuttling for years. But, significantly enough, what the TGWU had tolerated the militant but unofficial action of Hull dockers abolished. This strike however had much wider repercussions. All the frustration and seething discontent felt by these docker members for the Transport and General Workers' Union at the set-up in their union came suddenly to a head. A mass meeting of striking dockers on August 22 decided almost unanimously to apply for membership of the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers. A few days later a leaflet was issued by their strike committee and sent across to Merseyside. It summed up their feelings in this way:

> For many years we dockers of Hull have resented the way the Transport and General Workers' Union has handled our disputes. Time after time we have reported our grievances to the TGWU only to receive the reply: there is nothing we can do, our hands are tied.
>
> We of Hull believe the time has come to do some untying: that is, to untie ourselves from the TGWU and enter the blue union. We also believe that the experiences of the Merseyside dockers in the TGWU are the same as ours in Hull.
>
> We therefore call upon you to defend your interests by joining with us and supporting us in our attempt to achieve the unity of dockers within the democratic structure of the blue union.

Four weeks after the Hull meeting a thousand Birkenhead dockers packed themselves into Birkenhead Town Hall and enthusiastically agreed to follow Hull's example. All but a tiny handful of Birkenhead's 2,000 dockers subsequently applied to join the NASD. Manchester followed soon after and by the end of the year dockers were flocking into the 'blue union' from every group of docks on the Mersey waterfront.

THE 'BLUE UNION'

This was not the first time that a great body of dockers had broken with the TGWU. The Scottish Transport and General Workers' Union exists today as a result of a breakaway in 1932 embracing all the dockers in the ports of Glasgow and Campbeltown. They broke from the TGWU on whether their branch had the right to elect its eight full-time officials annually or whether they were to be appointed by the union's official leadership. The branch won a judgment in the courts confirming its right to elect its officials. Ernest Bevin, general secretary of the TGWU, promptly changed the rules of the union. In response, the dockers of Glasgow formed their own union.

The Dockers' Section of the NASD was itself formed by a break from the TGWU. In June 1923 40,000 dockers came out on strike against an agreement signed between the TGWU leaders and the port employers accepting a reduction of wages. As a result of this sell-

[2] **The Dock Worker.** An analysis of conditions in the Port of Manchester (University of Liverpool Department of Social Science, 1954)

out by Bevin and his colleagues, thousands of London dockers and lightermen left the TGWU and joined with the Stevedores' Protection Society (a union of long standing which did not join in the amalgamation of dockers' and other unions which led to the formation of the TGWU in 1922) to form the National Amalgamated Stevedores, Lightermen, Watermen and Dockers' Union.

The new union was expelled from the TUC, since the trade union leaders were anxious, as ever, to protect the growing power of the TGWU bureaucracy. In 1927 the new union divided to form two separate organizations, the Watermen, Lightermen, Tugmen and Bargemen's Union and the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers.

It was the latter union, by now a member of the TUC, that the northern dockers joined when in 1954-55 they marched out of the TGWU like a previous generation of dockers thirty years before. At the time of the Hull strike the NASD had 7,000 members—3,000 in the Dockers' Section and 4,000 in the Stevedores' Section. It operated only in London. The militant and democratic traditions of the 'blue union' attracted the northern men. Traditionally, in the NASD all major issues were referred back to the rank and file for final decisions. So it was necessary for the applications to join the union from the dockers of Merseyside, Manchester and Hull to be discussed by the rank-and-file members. The London meetings of the NASD came out overwhelmingly in favour of accepting these applications. The 'blue union' began to enrol the new members.

As in 1923, the General Council of the TUC immediately gave its support to the bureaucrats of the TGWU and the NASD was suspended from the TUC for 'poaching'. But the 'blue union' continued to expand in the North. Offices were set up in Hull, Birkenhead, Manchester and, finally, Liverpool. The TGWU leaders threatened dockers with loss of jobs if they joined the 'blue union'. In September 1954 the Birkenhead branch of the TGWU posted notices inviting 1,000 men to register at once to fill their waiting list for jobs on the dock and thus to replace dockers who wanted to join the NASD.

But in April 1955, when the dockers in Merseyside and Manchester applied for their new registration books, the threat to deprive 'blue union' members of their livelihood was decisively defeated. When 'blue union' men were refused registration books because they could not produce a TGWU clearance card, the men of the Manchester and Birkenhead docks struck, together with 13,000 of Liverpool's 17,000 dockers, completely paralysing the three ports. After a two-day strike the Manchester Dock Labour Board capitulated and the Merseyside Board followed suit. The first attempt to bludgeon men back into the TGWU had failed—miserably.

In the early months of 1955 large mass meetings of dockers were held in Hull, Manchester and Liverpool. Branches and regional committees of the NASD were rapidly set up. By March 1955 there were five branches in Birkenhead, twelve in Liverpool, two in Manchester and seven in Hull. Full-time officers were operating in all these northern ports. The popular nature of the movement was shown in the large attendances at branch meetings. Hundreds of dockers were swept into trade union branch activity for the first time in their lives. Many, acting as branch officers and committee members, gained their first experience of organizing, administration and meeting procedures. That first great organizing of the dock labourers sixty years before must have resembled, in many ways, these virile, raw but energetic forces which thronged the union meeting rooms. What a startling contrast to the tiny branch meetings of the TGWU! Apathy disappeared. In its place came enthusiasm. Dockers felt not just that they 'belonged' to the union. The union belonged to them.

Meanwhile opinion was hardening that it was time to begin negotiations for the recognition of the NASD by the employers in the northern ports. Finally a delegate meeting in London at the beginning of May 1955 resolved to propose strike action as from May 23 if recognition was not granted. The recommendation went before mass meetings in London, Hull, Manchester and Merseyside. In Hull only twenty-two men, in a meeting of 1,500, voted against the strike ultimatum. It was the same in all the ports. Everywhere the recommendation was endorsed by absolutely decisive majorities.

THE RECOGNITION STRIKE

Over 20,000 dockers stopped work on the Monday the ultimatum expired. Several thousand TGWU men came out in sympathy with the 'blue union'. Surveying the beginning of that strike now, it is clearer than ever that there was every chance of victory. The strike had solid support in the ranks of the NASD.

The employers placed the onus for non-recognition on an 'inter-union struggle', stating that recognition was a matter for the unions to settle among themselves. In this way the employers left themselves a way of retreating. There was also a great measure of public opinion behind the 'blue union' dockers on the issue of their fight to belong to a union of their choice. This feeling was reflected in a sympathetic editorial in the *Manchester Guardian*. Sympathetic action by dockers in other ports could have been developed. The TGWU leadership was desperately afraid of the spread of the strike. Mr A. E. Tiffin, general secretary of the TGWU, was later to reveal how near they felt the NASD came to success. Speaking to a Docks National Committee in August 1955, and dealing with the resistance of his union to the demand of the 'blue union' for recognition, he declared: 'That battle could have been lost. In his opinion it was one of the greatest crises we have had to face for a long period of time.' A statement issued by the TGWU on the eve of the strike testified to a state of near-panic. It called on its docker members to remain at work and declared that only 'a reign of anarchy and terror' could result from the 'blue union's' action.

The TUC condemned the strike and demanded that the 'blue union' should hand back the northern men to the TGWU. What the 10,000 workers concerned thought about it all was apparently felt to be unimportant in Smith Square. Then, as now, the matter was for the TUC leaders merely a question of making 'suitable' arrangements at the top. The ranks could be herded around and bartered.

When the strike started, leaders of the TGWU de-

cleared that they were willing to spend £9 million to break it. Such prodigality with union funds was unheard of when it was a matter of a wages application being rejected by the employers. Here it was a question of defending the power of the union apparatus. There were no barriers now to releasing the full financial resources of the union and the energy of officials, all of which had usually remained securely under lock and key in fights against the employers.

The campaign the TGWU launched failed—at least so far as the rank and file were concerned. Officials in Manchester, who boasted they would lead the men back to work, waited at the dock gates—alone. When national officers of the union called their members to a meeting in Liverpool 3,000 dockers gave them such a rough handling that they had to call in a police escort before they could leave. As they left they were pelted with crusts of bread—a reply to an earlier threat of one official that the strikers would be forced to eat crusts.

The strike lasted six weeks. The men received no strike pay and suffered very real hardship. But in the end it was not a break in the militancy of the rank and file which prevented victory. If the outcome had rested solely on that there is no doubt that the 'blue union' would have won. Success can never be absolutely guaranteed in any working-class struggle. There were, however, many essential ingredients for success present at the beginning of the recognition strike. Why then did it fail? The answer lies partly in the lamentable weakness which quickly showed itself among a section of the London leadership of the NASD. They had welcomed the northern men into the union. They ended, not only by letting down the men in the north, but also by flouting the whole democratic traditions of the 'blue union'.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

But lack of firmness, of understanding, of loyalty to the ranks on the part of individual leaders is not the whole answer. For that we need to consider the part played by the leaders of the Communist Party. In the months before the strike for recognition, Communist Party leaders opposed the development of the 'blue union' in the provincial ports. When Hull dockers joined, Harry Pollitt attacked their action and called for 'unity in the fight to democratize the Transport and General Workers' Union'. In fact however the Stalinist policy aimed only to secure by any means (and certainly not by principled methods) the lifting of the ban on communists' occupying official positions in the TGWU.

The official line of the Communist Party towards the 'blue union' movement was not accepted by its own dock members without many misgivings and much opposition. Nevertheless in the days before the Khrushchev speech this did not prevent the 'line' from being carried through. As a result, not only did the Communist Party help to defeat the recognition strike, but in the process its own influence and membership on the docks were almost completely destroyed.

On December 31, 1954, an article by Vic Marney, a well-known docker member of the Communist Party, appeared in *Tribune*. *Tribune*, incidentally, gave a sympathetic treatment to the 'blue union'. Marney, at this time, was secretary of the 'Liaison Committee', an unofficial committee of TGWU members, influenced by the Communist Party. He declared in his *Tribune* article that the Liaison Committee had decided 'under no circumstances will they be involved in any struggle for the recognition of the NASD in the outer ports'. This was clear notice of an intention to blackleg. But when the strike began docker members of the Communist Party refused to become blacklegs. Unfortunately the Communist Party undermined the strike more effectively than if its members had openly crossed the picket-line.

The strike had not been on more than a few days when the Liaison Committee, together with the executive of the lightermen's union, met the London executive committee of the NASD and demanded they call the strike off. The pressure which they continued till the end of the strike on the London leadership of the NASD was supplemented by the *Daily Worker* whose reports played down the numbers on strike and the possibility of support in other ports. This paper continually gave the impression that the strike was about to be called off.

A fortnight after the strike began the London executive of the 'blue union' pushed the Liaison Committee's recommendation through at a conference between the executive and delegates from the northern ports. To achieve this the chairman, an officer of the union who had recruited men in the North and who, a year or so later, was to join the TGWU, used both his ordinary vote and a casting vote. The recommendation was carried against the united opposition of the northern representatives. Members of the London executive were not so desperate as to break with the democratic practices of the NASD and they did put their recommendation before the rank and file. Mass meetings in London and the North rejected the proposal. They gave similar treatment to another recommendation for a return to work a fortnight later.

But the damage was being done. However near the employers came to giving way in face of the determination of the rank and file, they still held back in the hope that the opponents of the strike inside the trade union movement would succeed in their efforts to break it. The national delegate conference was forced to spend hour after hour, day after day, discussing formulas for capitulation, when a vigorous campaign to win support for recognition of the 'blue union' had every chance of a quick and overwhelming victory. The closing stage was reached when the delegate conference agreed to go before a disputes commission set up by the TUC. At the disputes commission the NASD was represented by the chairman, and two national officers—both of whom were leaving their jobs at the end of the month.[3]

THE BETRAYAL

Then came the last act, a betrayal of the democratic traditions of the 'blue union', of the loyalty of the

[3]On July 3, the day before the strike ended, a feature article appeared in the Empire News under the name of one of these officers, the Stevedores' Sectional Secretary. His term of office had ended two days before. It was a witch-hunting denunciation of the strike, full of unproven allegations, declaring the strike to be the responsibility of one man and calling for the handing back of the northern men to the TGWU.

men in the North and of the London rank and file.

The TUC disputes commission demanded the expulsion of the northern men from the 'blue union'. In return, the suspension of the NASD from the TUC was to be lifted. Excluding northern representatives from the vote, the London executive met on Friday, July 1, and carried a resolution moved by a Communist Party member to accept the demand and to instruct the strikers to return to work the following Monday. This action was directly contrary to the procedure which had always been operated in the union. Previously rank-and-file meetings had always had the final word in beginning or ending strike action. The following weekend meetings called by northern leaders were held in the northern ports. Rank-and-file leaders called a meeting in London.

Despite the defections amongst the London leaders, morale remained high in the ranks. But the northern committeemen had to take into consideration the length of the strike, the necessity to preserve forces and the added strain, after the repudiation of the North by the London executive, on the TGWU members who had supported the strike. They therefore recommended a return to work—but as members of the 'blue'. Six thousand dockers meeting in Liverpool reiterated their intention of remaining in the 'blue union'. They announced that, while returning to work, they would carry on the fight for recognition as a united force with their brothers in other ports and would continue the struggle against 'all those who opposed and undermined our fight for recognition'. In Birkenhead a great number voted against a return to work. A picture of the spirit of the men in the North was given by the *Manchester Guardian* reporter who attended the Manchester meeting:

> As in Merseyside (and, it seems, in accordance with the new general policy of the 'Blue Union' in the Northern ports) the retreat was made in good order and the language was as firm and militant as it has been at any time in the last six weeks. No one, from the cheerfulness of the crowd, would have guessed that it was the end of a six week strike.

In Hull the strikers marched back to work, as they had marched through the city several times while the strike was on.

In the following week the secretaries of 'blue union' branches in the North received letters from the acting general secretary of the NASD coldly informing them that they were excluded from the union as from July 6. It was in this way that a majority of the union's members were expelled.

NOT DEFEATED

But the NASD leaders who carried through this action, and the TUC leaders who sponsored it, were to find that the account was not closed. As always, they underrated working class tenacity. 'Oh yes, I'm certain the men will return to the Transport Workers' Union.' With these words, spoken in a graciously patronizing manner, a representative of the General Council of the TUC dismissed a warning of a northern leader. This official and his colleagues spoke too soon. But prudence was never a virtue of trade union officials, who appear congenitally unable and unwilling to understand the feelings of the men on the waterfront. The men did not return to the TGWU. In fact, absolutely amazingly—or so it must have appeared to Transport House and Smith Square—the 'blue union' organization in the North refused to be killed. The northern men continued to pay their subscriptions, to maintain their branches, their committees and their full-time officials. They kept up the offices in Liverpool, Birkenhead, Manchester and Hull, which remain there today. They decided to figiht their expulsion in the courts.

The six-weeks recognition strike demanded great sacrifices from these dockers. Since its betrayal they have fought a war of attrition which has imposed even greater strains on them. Legal proceedings dragged on for nine months. On the docks 'blue union' militants were disciplined for the smallest offence. Recognition was still denied. But the movement remained and was capable from time to time of showing its teeth. In October 1955 10,000 Merseyside dockers responded to a call for a one-day stoppage and won the reinstatement of two 'blue union' members sacked after an allegation that at a bus stop they called another docker a 'scab'.

In March 1956 their 'test case', Spring versus National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers, came before the Liverpool court. The courtroom was crowded with dockers. A few days later judgment was given. Spring was declared wrongfully expelled. The northern men were back in the NASD.

But their fight was still not ended and it is not ended yet. Despite the fact that the northern men have established their right to be members of the 'blue union', both legally and by their stubborn determination, the TUC and the TGWU leaders still drag out discussions with the NASD on their future. TGWU officials continue their attempts to drive men back into their union. The TGWU leaders propose that the men in the North should retain their NASD cards, but with the TGWU 'servicing' them. This farcical proposal has been rejected both by London and northern dockers, for it is obviously the first step to eliminating the 'blue union' entirely in the North—and later in London. For while the 'blue union' exists at all it attracts dockers in struggle.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 'BLUE' UNION

Undoubtedly the 'blue union' movement in the northern ports was a progressive development. Perhaps the biggest task in the trade union movement today is the reassertion of rank-and-file control. It is foolish to think that this can come about without shake-ups in trade union structure and without explosive movements. For in the heavily bureaucratized, and often corrupt, unions of Britain today rank-and-file 'democracy', like democracy in the capitalist society in which they exist, is often just an expensive farce. Democracy is not simply a question of balloting, resolutions and waiting for enlightenment and a change of heart among the leaders.

If the bureaucratic apparatus ceases to be a servant of the members, if it preserve itself as master over the ranks, to perpetuate itself by a system of 'appointments' rather than elections, if it constantly beats down militant workers and groups, then expulsions are inevitable. So, too, struggles in which the workers have to fight against both the employers and the trade union leadership are inevitable. Moreover, given the right circumstances, large groups of trade union members will seek to break out of what has for them become a union

'prison house' in which all workers' initiative, all attempts to express their own ideas on the defence of their interests, remain caged, canalized or simply suppressed.

Trade unions are essentially instruments of the working class. The value of their organizational structure can be measured only in relation to how that structure serves the interests of the working class. Of course no serious trade union militant will, lightly, propose a break with even the most bureaucratic workers' organization. He will seriously consider the worker's traditional loyalty to his union and the extreme difficulties of setting up new trade union organizations. But the mass walk-out of the 'blue union' cannot be regarded as in any sense artificial. It corresponded to long-acting processes deep within the TGWU. In 1954-55 these long-active forces burst out, an explosion of working-class struggle parallel to the explosion of the Hungarian workers against 'their' bureaucracy.

The fight for the 'blue' will be recognized by Labour historians as one of the most important developments in post-war trade union history. Many thousands of dockers have remained steadfast, with the aim of building a militant portworkers' union, despite attacks and continuing pressure from inside and outside the Labour movement. Their spirit will yet win recognition and will yet create in the 'blue union' that national militant democratic union which they desire. In this they will provide many more important lessons for the working class on how to defeat parasitic Labour bureaucracies which have fastened themselves upon the world Labour movement.

The Early Years of the CPGB

Joseph Redman

[N.B. The following abbreviations have been used throughout:

CI for *Communist International*
CR for *Communist Review*
LM for *Labour Monthly*]

JULIAN SYMONS has done a service to the British working-class movement by writing *The General Strike*.[1] At this time when great clashes between Capital and Labour are in prospect it is particularly valuable to have a fresh and thorough study of the major industrial conflict of our age, for examination of the history of the General Strike can help to clarify understanding of the dangers and possibilities that confront us now.

Besides the printed materials,[2] Mr Symons has used the Transport House records and a mass of private letters and diaries which were made available to him by participants in the struggle, both strikers and strike-breakers. The two strongest impressions left by the book are, first, that contrary to what the author calls 'a much cherished myth' of the British bourgeoisie the strike was not weakening but actually growing stronger at the moment when it was called off (figures are given that show how 'the railway services were chaotic, and functioned with only a small fraction of their normal efficiency'); and, second, the sharp contrast between the behaviour of the leadership and that of the rank and file. Not only had the General Council totally failed to prepare for the conflict or even to draw up a strategic plan—some of its members, and especially J. H. Thomas, worked deliberately, from the start, to betray their followers. The mass of the strikers meanwhile displayed both enthusiasm (groups not called out pressing the leadership to call them out) and that amazing power of self-organization that is so characteristic of the British working class in an emergency. Mr Symons shows the anxious concern of the General Council to prevent the rank and file getting out of hand:

> The problem of controlling provincial activities much engaged the General Council. It was feared that in some provincial towns and cities extreme Left-wing elements might take control and couduct the strike as a purely political affair. Hence, the Strike Organization Committee tried from the first to maintain a control over provincial activities which was, in the circumstances, simply unworkable, and which contrasts markedly with the Government's plan to give the greatest possible degree of autonomy to Civil Commissioners.[3]

The chairman of the Strike Organization Committee was that A. A. Purcell who had been given such a build-up as a 'Left' by the communists in the preceding twelve months, on the strength of his membership of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee.[4] Another of these alleged Lefts, Swales, was one of the committee of three who negotiated with Baldwin on the eve of the strike, and Mr Symons notes that he, 'who might have been expected to protest' against the Government's proposals, 'was the least vocal of the three'. Summing up on the 'Lefts', the author writes:

> The Left-wing trade union leaders played what seems in retrospect a strikingly timid part. They were outnumbered, but they occupied important positions. One of them, Purcell, was chairman of the Strike Organization Committee; George Hicks, John Bromley, Ben Tillett and A. B. Swales were leading figures on various committees. After the strike was over some of them spoke brave words to the effect that it had been a class struggle, yet during the nine days there is no suggestion that opinion in the General Council was seriously divided at any time.[5]

It is implicit in the story of the General Strike as set forth in this book that the communists, though they worked devotedly and were the object of special persecution by the police, played no special role in the strike and certainly did nothing to justify the fears of the General Council that they might try to take over the leadership. Reactions to my article 'British Communist History' in the July-August number of LABOUR REVIEW have shown that this is an unfamiliar conception to many communists and also to ex-communists of recent vintage. When they appreciate that it is nevertheless true, the usual comment is either: 'Well, anyway, it was Thomas and Co. who betrayed the strike, not the communists', or: 'What was to be expected? After all, the party's leaders were in jail in the vital period'.

To the first of these comments I would reply that one of the jobs that communists are sent into the world to do is to save the workers from being betrayed by the Thomases; and to the second, that it does an injustice both to communists generally and to the British communists of 1925-26 in particular. Lenin was on the run and Trotsky in prison when Kornilov launched his attack on Petrograd, but that did not prevent the Bolsheviks from turning the tables upon him, in spite of everything, Kerensky included. So far as Britain in 1926 was concerned, George Hardy writes in his useful memoirs *Those Stormy Years* that, though the arrests were 'a severe blow', nevertheless 'plans for an alternative leading group had been made. Bob Stewart stepped into the breach as acting general secretary and several members, including myself, were brought on to the Political Bureau'.

That the Communist Party failed to play the role in the General Strike which most people, friends and

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[1]Cresset Press, 21s.

[2]Omitting, however, the valuable pamphlet **The Reds and the General Strike,** published by the Communist Party in June 1926.

[3]J. Symons, **op. cit.** p. 64.

[4]An adulatory obituary of Purcell, without one word regarding his role in 1926, was contributed to the **LM** of February 1936 by John Mahon. ('Purcell's thoughts on the betrayal of the General Strike are not to be found in speeches or writings. They must have been bitter.')

[5]Symons, **op. cit.** pp. 135-6.

foes alike, had expected it would play, was a commonplace in the period immediately ensuing. For example, Harold Laski wrote in his book *Communism* (1927): 'It was noteworthy that in the British General Strike of 1926 the communists played practically no part at all', and Hamilton Fyfe, in his diary of the conflict, *Behind the Scenes of the Great Strike* (1926) noted: 'The communists have kept very quiet . . . On the Continent, in America even, it is the extremists who come to the top in crises. Here they have sunk out of sight'. The suggestion that there might have been some foundation for the Government's alleged fear of revolution was firmly rebutted by T. H. Wintringham, in the *CR* for June 1926: 'The Communist Party knew, as the TUC leaders knew, that this was not the time for anything but solid resistance to a deliberate attack'. George Hardy acknowledges that 'the Councils of Action, with a few exceptions, functioned only in a limited way'. E. H. Brown, reporting to the Organization Conference of the CPGB in October 1926, said: 'It must be admitted that our factory groups were weak and did not function properly during the General Strike. In some districts the groups stopped functioning altogether' (quoted by Piatnitsky, in *CI*, June 15, 1927). 'A British Communist' wrote, approvingly, in the Paris monthly *La Révolution prolétarienne* for July 1926 that 'the acting general secretary called upon the members of the party to behave as loyal trade unionists and carry out the instructions of the General Council—which they did'. P. Braun, in the *LM* of January 1927, declared that it was 'quite obvious that during the days of the General Strike, when millions of workers came out to fight for the cause of Labour against the Government, the Communist Party believed that the General Council would not dare to betray such a magnificent fight. It is a fact that, even after Baldwin made it perfectly clear in the House of Commons that the representatives of the TUC were prepared to discuss the formula drafted by Birkenhead, which definitely mentioned wage reductions, the *Workers' Bulletin* (the official organ of the Communist Party during the period of the General Strike) of May 7 expressed the hope that the leaders of the General Council would frankly admit that they had made a mistake, and that they would stand solidly by the miners' slogans'.[6]

Trotsky summed up the chief lesson of the General Strike in the sentence: 'The entire present "superstructure" of the British working class, in all its shades and groups without exception, is an apparatus for putting a brake on the revolution'[7] To this judgment the executive committee of the Comintern sharply retorted in its resolution of June 8: 'The attempts to include the Communist Party of Great Britain in the arsenal of "brakes on the revolution" do not bear criticism'. It is not my purpose in this article, however, to go further into the history of the debate which took place in the international communist movement on the conclusions for the subsequent period to be drawn from the defeat of the General Strike in Britain, though I am well aware that I only touched the fringe of the subject in the July-August 1957 LABOUR REVIEW. What I wish to do here is to reinforce my account in 'British Communist History' of how the CPGB *arrived at* the lamentable political position indicated above, showing that the beginning of the decline and fall of this party as revolutionary Marxist party is to be dated from 1925; and briefly to consider, in the light of the history of the first five years of the party, how far this downfall was 'inevitable' and to what factors it was due.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SECTARIANISM

Though formed in August 1920 (with adhesion of some further groups in January 1921), the British Communist Party remained for its first year or two of existence little more than an amalgamated and enlarged version of the propagandist sects which had preceded it. It took the moral pressure of Lenin himself to bring about the fusion of the various sects into a single party in the first place (*'Left-Wing' Communism* and *Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst*), and from the beginning Lenin, Trotsky and the whole Comintern leadership of 1920-23 had to struggle against the rooted sectarianism of the British Marxists. At the convention where the Communist Party was established strong opposition was expressed to Moscow's advice that the party apply for affiliation to the Labour Party: the Russian comrades did not know what they were talking about, said some, and the vote, taken after a debate in which most of the speakers opposed affiliation, was the narrow one of 100-85 in favour. The first application for affiliation was couched in terms that invited rejection, and when this duly came, the party leadership's relief was unconcealed. *The Communist* of September 16, 1920, wrote: 'So be it. It is their funeral, not ours.' A message from the Comintern compelled the British communists to reconsider this estimate of what had happened, and a week later the same paper explained that 'it is the duty of the communists to work where the masses are. That may mean going into reactionary organizations, but that is better and easier than creating brand new organizations in the hope that the masses will leave the old ones and come to the new'.

The basic attitude of the CPGB, derived from prewar Social Democratic Federation traditions, remained unchanged, however, and this was shown in the activities which it launched towards the end of 1920 and in early 1921. The unemployed workers' committee which were set up on communist initiative did a tremendous job in bringing pressure to bear on local authorities, stopping blacklegging and agitating against overtime, but the achievements of the unemployed movement were far less than could have been won with a less sectarian approach. There was little sustained effort to establish links with the trades councils and achieve recognition by the organized Labour movement. Satisfaction with unemployed 'separatism' was combined with a tendency to neglect steady work and concentrate on stunt demonstrations.[8] Then there was the East

[6]See also the quotation in the editorial in the **CR** for October 1926 from an unpublished article received from an unnamed comrade, reproaching the party leaders for 'failing to take steps to provide an alternative trade union leadership nationally, in anticipation of the breakdown of the General Council . . . [This was] the whole party feeling during the General Strike: the feeling that the party was not responsible for the central lead—that had already been given by the General Council, and we could not alter it.'

[7]**Pravda,** May 26, 1926.

[8]See E. Stanley, **CR,** December 1924: a critical review of the experience of the unemployed movement.

Woolwich by-election, when the party stumped the constituency calling on the workers to abstain because Tory and Labour were 'two of a kind' and *The Communist* of March 5, 1921, boasted that the Labour candidate's defeat (by 683 votes in a poll of 27,000) was due to the communist campaign. This sort of thing prevented the party from winning the political influence among the workers that the valiant work of many of its members during the 'Black Friday' period might otherwise have secured, and provided the Right-wing leaders of the Labour Party with ready-made arguments against affiliation which they kept bringing up for years afterward.[9]

The persistent 'Leftism' of the west European Communist Parties in this period found its supreme expression in the so-called 'March action' (1921) in Germany. Had the Comintern leadership not given a sharp rebuff to attempts to justify this semi-putschist approach to politics and set the course unmistakably towards the united front and the winning of the masses, 'perhaps within a year or two only splinters of Communist Parties would have been left'.[10] What Soviet Russia needed was successful revolutions in the West, Lenin and Trotsky pointed out to all concerned, and these would not be brought nearer by futile self-immolations of the revolutionary minority. The Comintern's calls during and after the Third World Congress (1921) for serious and self-sacrificing efforts for working-class unity 'came to the party in Britain practically as a shock', admitted J. T. Murphy at the succeeding Congress in 1922.

Under the guidance of the Comintern, the CPGB began in the autumn of 1921 to set its house in order and take serious steps towards becoming the leader of the working class. A campaign was launched to popularize a scheme of reorganization of the TUC ('A Parliament of Labour') whereby, in addition to delegates of the national trade unions, it should contain representatives of the trades councils and also direct representation of the workers in the workshops.[11] In the demoralization following 'Black Friday' great numbers of workers had torn up their union cards and a successful employers' offensive was under way. The communists set themselves to reverse this trend, with the slogans: 'Back to the Unions!' and 'Stop the Retreat!' When the engineering lock-out began, in April, 1922, the party for the first time, instead of *merely* denouncing the trade union bureaucrats, put forward a number of practical, specific proposals. In each locality the communists strove to revive and strengthen the neglected trades councils, working for every trade union branch and district committee to affiliate to its appropriate trades council and to transform these bodies into local centres for co-ordinating the workers' struggles. (In October 1922, largely in consequence of these efforts, a national conference of trades councils was convened by the Birmingham Trades Council, with Alex Gossip in the chair).[12]

At the same time, a new and more honest approach was made to the Labour Party for affiliation (November 1921). The issue of violence was frankly faced.

> Under normal circumstances the Labour Party acted within the law; the Communist Party declared itself prepared to do the same. However, should extraordinary circumstances arise, the Communist Party would be compelled to consider other means, in much the same way as the Labour Party had, in 1920, in forming Councils of Action . . .[13]

Within the party leadership there was a deep resistance, however, to the entire united front conception, and the policy conference held in March 1922 agreed to embrace it only on the basis of T. A. Jackson's notorious formulation about 'taking the Labour leaders by the hand in order later to take them by the throat'. With all its weaknesses, however, this conference was a landmark in the party's history in that it signalized the 'abandonment of the tradition of claiming the allegiance of the workers as a right'.[14] The British communists were trying to put into effect, even though with misgivings and backslidings, the advice that Lenin was offering about the same time to the communists of Italy: not to 'lose patience' in exposing the social-democratic leaders 'in a practical way', 'not to yield to the very easy and very dangerous decision to say "minus a" whenever Serrati says "a" '.[15] In the same period, Trotsky wrote to the Congress of the French Communist Party:

> To put forward the programme of the social revolution and oppose it 'intransigently' to the Dissidents and the syndico-reformists, while refusing to enter into any negotiations with them until they recognize our programme—this is a very simple policy which requires neither resourcefulness nor energy, neither flexibility nor initiative. It is not a communist policy. We communists seek for methods and avenues of bringing politically, practically and in action the still unconscious masses to the point where they begin posing the revolutionary issues themselves.[16]

In August 1922, as an earnest of the sincerity of its approach to Labour, the CPGB withdrew all the candidates it had been intending to stand against Labour candidates in the impending General Election. (This did not affect communist members of the Labour Party who had been adopted as Labour candidates, or communists standing where there was no Labour candidate in the field). The new communist attitude was frankly explained.

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[9]In August 1921 the CPGB stood Bob Stewart against a Labour candidate in the by-election at Caerphilly. In his election address he declared: 'We oppose the Labour Party for the simple reason that it is not a Labour Party at all.' Though the South Wales Miners' Federation had just affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions, Stewart found himself at the bottom of the poll.

[10]L. Trotsky, Introduction to **The First Five Years of the Communist International,** vol. 1 (New York, 1945).

[11]See article by R P. Arnot in **LM,** October 1921.

[12]On this period as a whole, see the survey of the first four years of the CPGB in **CR,** August 1924. From the party's proposals during the engineering lock-out developed the programme of the Metal Workers' Minority Movement—increase of wages of £1 on all existing rates; 44-hour working week; two weeks' holiday with pay; amalgamation of all the unions in the industry into one; formation of workshop committees representing all grades.

[13]Summary of the correspondence in S. R. Graubard, **British Labour and the Russian Revolution** (1956), p. 149.

[14]**The Communist,** April 1, 1922.

[15]V. I. Lenin, 'Notes of a Publicist', **Selected Works** (12-vol. ed.), vol. 10, p. 313. See also the advice against 'stewing in one's own juice', **ibid.** p. 304.

[16]Trotsky, **op. cit.** vol. 2 (1953), p. 174.

> The Communist Party cannot oppose the Labour Party in so far as it is the party of the workers any more than than it can oppose the trade unions as such; but it can as it does with the trade unions, fight the reactionary junta and seek to transform the Labour Party into an instrument of revolutionary progress.
>
> The faith of the workers in the present leaders of the Labour Party must be tried and outlived by experience. This experience the communists will assist them to obtain by their **action.**[17]

Steadily increasing support began to accrue to the demand for Communist Party affiliation to the Labour Party, among the trades councils, notably in London and Glasgow, and in certain unions, especially the Miners' Federation.

THE TURN TO MASS WORK

The party conference of March 1922, besides accepting the Comintern's united front policy, had set up a commission to reorganize the party in accordance with the principles of party structure laid down by the Third Congress of the Comintern. The two questions were closely linked, for if the party was to strike roots in the masses it must cease to be organized primarily as a propaganda society. Broadly speaking, the same section of the membership that was indifferent, or worse, to the united front was perfectly satisfied with the old federal structure, the old large, debating-society branches and the old concentration on street-corner meetings, though it was already plain that a party so organized could never get into a position to lead a British workers' revolution. The Reorganization Commission reported to a party Congress held in October 1922 which accepted its report, and in the ensuing six months this report was put into effect. A certain amount of financial looseness had flourished under the old order, and the elimination of this led to the departure of certain 'leading comrades', while others turned away from a party which was being transformed into a *working* party in a new sense. By and large the effects of the reorganization were salutary, and it is a pity that the Commission's report has become a rare document and the story of its work so little known among Communist Party members.

At the same time, the centralization of power in the party, the break-up of branches into small groups and the emphasis upon work involved potentially a serious danger—that the party might be transformed into a mere executive mechanism, submissive in the hands of an uncontrolled leadership. Lenin showed himself aware that the resolution of the Third Comintern Congress on organization might do harm as well as good, and sounded a warning note in relation to its application, in his speech of November 13, 1922,[18] but his call for caution in this matter was overlooked by some, and perhaps deliberately ignored by others, when illness withdrew him shortly afterwards from regular political activity. In 1924 a significant exchange of views took place in the pages of the *CR* regarding the negative aspects of the reorganization. J. T. Murphy drew attention to the submergence of members in organizational work and the lack of education and discussion in the party. 'Already the party lead is accepted too formally, and the voice of political criticism too seldom raised within our ranks'. Pollitt, replying, jeered at concern with thnking and discussion on the part of the membership —carrying out the line was the thing for them. T. A. Jackson, answering Pollitt, supported Murphy's criticisms and asked: 'Is an ignorant membership necessary to the working of the plan of organization adopted at Battersea?' Was it to be accepted that the leading committee's task was to 'understand' while 'our job is only to carry out all instructions at the double, and stand to attention until the next order comes'? 'The meaning of "instructions" . . . is lost because the reason for their adoption at the point of incubation is rarely given . . . Little or no discussion is possible, except on the pettiest of petty details.'[19]

At the beginning of 1923, however, the negative potentialities of reorganization in a political setting in which the views of Lenin and Trotsky counted for less and less, and the consequences of bureaucratic degeneration in Soviet Russia spread throughout the international communist movement, were still hidden in the future. The immediate effects were positive. The weekly, *The Communist*, an essentially propagandist paper, was transformed into the *Workers' Weekly*, a real newspaper of the day-to-day struggle, giving timely and detailed leads on the living issues arising in the working-class world. The transformation of the party's structure helped to bring about a marked strengthening of its influence through the movement, both on the industrial and on the political side. Successful anti-war campaigns were conducted at the time of the Chanak crisis and on the occasion of the Curzon ultimatum. A Left wing appeared and became prominent in the Labour Party, its growth expressed in the defeat of Clynes as party leader and the emergence of the Clydeside group of MPs around John Wheatley, who maintained friendly relations with the Communist Party.[20] Above all, militant rank-and-file movements began to arise in union after union, with programmes of specific demands directed against the employers and definite proposals for democratizing and strengthening the unions themselves.[21] Of great importance in this con-

[17] **Communist Party Policy** and **The Communist Party, the Labour Party and the United Front** (both CPGB, 1922).

[18] Lenin, **op. cit.** pp. 332-3. See the discussion of this speech in A. Rosmer, **Moscou sous Lénine** (1953).

[19] **CR,** January, February and April 1924. See also Report of Sixth Congress of CPGB (May 1924) and articles by E. Cant and C. M. Roebuck in **CR** of March and June 1924. Cant, at this time party organizer for London, warned against a tendency for members to become robots, and observed that 'the comrade who said he was too busy selling the **Workers' Weekly** to read it himself is not a myth'. Significantly, the same negative consequences of reorganization that were noticed in Britain were also noticed in the French party: see chap. xi, 'La Bolchévisation du parti', in G. Walter, **Histoire du Parti Communiste français** (1948).

[20] On personal relations between Clyde Group MPs and communist leaders, see W. Gallacher, **The Rolling of the Thunder** (1947). For the role of communist journalists on the **Daily Herald** in 1923, see Hamilton Fyfe, **My Seven Selves** (1935).

[21] The spring of 1923 saw the first big mass actions in industry since 1920—among dockers, vehicle-builders, jute-workers, builders, boilermakers, agricultural labourers—and the first check to the decline in trade union membership. At the Labour Party Conference of 1923 the leadership was forced to withdraw the so-called 'Edinburgh clause' adopted the previous year, recommending trade unions not to elect communists as their delegates. It was understood that a number of unions would have withdrawn their delegations altogether if the credentials of the communists among them had been refused.

nexion was the conference on British communist affairs held in Moscow in July 1923 and attended by most of the leaders of the CPGB. From this conference sprang the Industrial Committee of the Communist Party and the moves which led to the drawing together of the various rank-and-file movements into the National Minority Movement, the 'trade union opposition' which became a major factor in the British working-class movement in 1924-25. This was the last occasion on which the Comintern intervened in British communist affairs to good purpose.

The election held at the end of 1923 which brought the Labour Party into office for the first time saw the CPGB at its highest point since foundation. Though the Party had only about 4,000 members, the *Workers' Weekly* sold 50,000 copies—more than any other Labour or socialist weekly—and communists received 66,500 votes in the election. Ties with the working class and its organizations were now substantial and increasing. The situation towards which Lenin had pointed four years before had at last come about, with the reformists obliged to show their true mettle as the ruling party. Trotsky said: 'The result of the MacDonald régime, however it may end from the formal standpoint, will be a deepening of criticism and self-criticism in the ranks of the working class. For Britain the epoch of the formation of the Communist Party is only now really opening.'[22] One of the key questions of British history between the wars is: why did the experience of the first Labour Government not lead to a great strengthening of the position of the Communist Party in Britain and so within a short period to that British revolution which down to 1926 was widely considered, among capitalists and workers alike, a perfectly definite possibility? Why, when at the beginning of 1924 the CPGB's prospects of integrating itself organically in the British working-class movement, and becoming the leading force within it, were so promising, had so little advance been made two years later that such a disaster as the betrayal of the General Strike could occur?

THE GERMAN EVENTS OF 1923: COMINTERN REACTION

When, at the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern in 1922, Trotsky had spoken of the prospect in the near future of a Labour government in Britain opening a 'Kerensky period' here, this forecast had been linked with that of a victorious revolution in Germany.[23] In July-October 1923 a revolutionary situation had arisen in Germany in connexion with the invasion of the Ruhr —and the Communist Party, held back by the new Zinoviev-Stalin leadership in Moscow, had 'missed the bus'. The developments in Germany had attracted enormous attention, in Britain as elsewhere, the CPGB carrying on a campaign against intervention, should the revolution succeed, under the slogan: 'Hands off Workers' Germany!' The disappointment felt at the revolution's failure was proportional. On the basis of the defeat of the German workers German and international capital proceeded to 'stabilize' the situation in Germany (Dawes Plan), and revolutionary moods and strivings received a setback everywhere. Frank recognition of what had happened was the urgent need of the day, with adaptation of policies to the new conjuncture. This was recognized and urged by Trotsky in a number of speeches and articles in early 1924.[24] A very different state of mind prevailed, however, in the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and of the Comintern. These bureaucrats were unwilling for prestige reasons to acknowledge that they had brought about a defeat, and were already too much out of touch with the realities of the working-class movement to understand the consequences which this defeat had produced. From this un-Marxist reaction of the Soviet leadership to the defeat of the German revolution, and their vindictive onslaught on Trotsky for trying to correct them in this matter, all the disintegration and corruption which now developed in the international communist movement had their beginning.

In his article on 'The Lessons of the German Events'[25] Zinoviev affirmed that 'as before, the tactics of the German Communist Party and of the entire Communist International must rest on the assumption that the proletarian revolution in Germany is a question of the near future', and *Pravda* of April 20, 1924, treated the defeat of the German workers as 'only an episode—the fundamental estimation remains as before'.[26] The Fifth Congress of the Comintern presented the world with a spectacle of political unrealism and fantasy which profoundly discredited the cause of communism and helped to check the advance of the Communist Parties in a number of countries, including Britain. 'At this Congress argument no longer has weight. Whoever talks the most radical language carries the day.'[27] Not only was the objectivity and genuine self-criticism characteristic of the first four Congresses replaced by wishful thinking and empty boasting, but the former freedom of debate was encroached upon by a threatening attitude on the part of the leadership towards critics and the organized howling-down of the latter. The British communists had to endure some ignorant hectoring by the German 'Lefts' now basking in Moscow's favour, who were unable to distinguish between the problem of the Labour Governmen and that of the Labour Party. (As E. H. Brown, one of the CPGB spokesmen, ventured to remark, Lenin

[22]Trotsky, **Through What Stage Are We Passing?** (June 21, 1924) Cf. the resolution of the executive committee of the Comintern, February 6, 1924: 'If, as is expected, the Labour Government betrays the interests of the proletariat, it will thus offer the best object lesson to the proletariat, enabling it to free itself from the illusions of capitalist democracy, and will thereby accelerate the revolutionizing of the working class.' Radek wrote, in the **CI,** no 3 (new series): 'For the first time in history the British communists have been given the opportunity of transforming themselves . . . into a mass party . . .'

[23]Trotsky, **The First Five Years,** vol. 2, pp. 211, 301.

[24]E.g., **On the Roads of the European Revolution,** April 11, 1924. 'We are living in the interval between the first and the second revolutionary blow. How long this interval will last we don't know'. (In this speech Trotsky forecast that the effect of the Dawes Plan would be to improve the position of German capitalism at the price of intensified economic difficulties for Britain—as actually occurred in 1925). See also his introduction to **The First Five Years.** For a comprehensive survey of the 1924-25 and 1925-27 phases in Comintern policy, see his **The Third International after Lenin** and **The Permanent Revolution.**

[25]**CI,** no 2 (new series).

[26]Cf. J. V. Stalin, letter to Demyan Byedny, July 1924 (**Works,** vol. 6, p. 288), and review of the international situation, September 1924 (**ibid.** pp. 292 ff.)

[27]'Ypsilon', **Pattern for World Revolution** (Chicago and New York, n.d. [1947]), p. 95.

had spent some considerable time and effort curing British communists of the ideas which Ruth Fischer was now trying to foist upon them.) The entire approach to British affairs by the new leadership was remote from reality. Zinoviev spoke of the power of the British bourgeoisie having been so badly shaken that the Labour Party would be in office 'for many years to come', maintaining the so-called 'Kerensky perspective' of 1922. (Trotsky pointed out in his speech of July 28, *Europe and America*, that the defeat of the German revolution had radically changed the situation, and 'in all probability MacDonald will this time cede place to the Tories, in accordance with all the rules of parliamentary procedure'.)

In was in 1924 that the enemies of communism could accuse the world communist movement, for the first time with adequate grounds, of adopting a political standpoint which was not justified by the actual facts but arose from the sordid requirements of the internal politics of the Soviet bureaucracy.[28] In 1924, too, they could point unanswerably to the phenomenon of dismissal and appointment of Communist Party leaderships in accordance with their readiness or otherwise to adapt themselves to the latest 'line' from Moscow. The first instance of this occurred with the Polish Communist Party—always something of a problem for Stalin, until in 1938 he dissolved it altogether and had its principal leaders executed. In December 1923 the Poles had written to the Soviet Communist Party expressing alarm at the prospect that Trotsky might be ousted from the leadership of the Comintern. The Fifth Congress of the Comintern was called upon to pass a resolution condemning those chiefly responsible for this letter, and Stalin, in his speech on the Communist Party of Poland, virtually declared war on any and every Party leadership that showed sympathy with the Opposition.[29] In Germany and a number of other countries sweeping changes were carried through so as to eliminate all who doubted whether the right faction was winning in Russia or questioned the wisdom of its intepretation of the political situation in the capitalist world.

All this was not lost upon the leadership of the British Communist Party: at the party Congress in May, Gallacher duly declared that 'the German workers . . . are even now preparing for the mighty struggle that will end the power of their own bourgeoisie', and at the Comintern Congress the British delegation was one of a group which submitted a resolution denouncing the opposition in the Russian party.[30] Nevertheless, these were merely advance warning symptoms of a disease which did not show itself in strength until the following year. The effects of the 1924-25 Leftist phase in the Comintern and the first stage of the anti-Trotsky struggle were only indirect and muted so far as Britain was concerned, and the main line of development all through 1924 and on into the early months of 1925 was a continuation of the upward trend begun in 1923.[31]

THE PARTY AND THE MINORITY MOVEMENT

In August 1924 the first annual conference of the National Minority Movement was held, with 200,000 workers represented. The conference called for the setting up of factory committees, as a stage towards industrial unionism and an instrument of workers' control, and for further work to develop the trades councils as local centres of militant leadership. Of particular importance, however, was the resolution calling for a strengthening of the powers of the TUC General Council in order to enable this body to lead the entire mass of trade unionists in a common struggle such as a General Strike. The resolution warned:

> It must not be imagined that the increase of the powers of the General Council will have the tendency to make it less reactionary. On the contrary, the tendency will be for it to become even more so. When the employing class realize that the General Council is really the head of the Trade Union movement, much more capitalist 'influence' will be brought to bear on it . . . The reactionaries desire a General Council which will check and dissipate all advances by the workers. We of the Minority Movement desire a General Council which will bring into being a bold and audacious General Staff of the Trade Union movement . . . We can guard against the General Council becoming a machine of the capitalists, and can really evolve from the General Council of Workers' General Staff only by, in the first place and fundamentally, developing a revolutionary class consciousness amongst the Trade Union membership, and in the second place, by so altering the constitution of the General Council as to ensure that those elected thereon have the closest contact with the workers.

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[28]The communist putsch in Estonia in December did 'untold harm to . . . the idea of proletarian revolution all over the world'. (C. L. R. James, **World Revolution, 1917-36** (1937).) Even greater scandal was caused by the bomb outrage in Sofia Cathedral in April 1925, which may be taken as concluding this phase of Comintern policy.

[29]Stalin, **op. cit.** pp. 276 ff.

[30]Zinoviev 'prepared' the constituent parties for the Comintern Congress by sending representatives to them to explain the views of the dominant faction on the key issues. According to the account of a meeting of the central committee of the CPGB in **Workers' Weekly,** June 6, 1924, 'a report was presented by the representative of the Comintern on two of the principal questions arising before the Congress—the question of the German retreat and the controversy in the Russian Communist Party'.

[31]Significant in relation to developments in a later period is the controversy which took place between R. P. Dutt and J. T. Murphy in the **CI,** 1924-25. Following the fall of the MacDonald Government, Dutt rushed into print to proclaim the 'decomposition' of the Labour Party, its transformation into an 'obstacle' to the workers' struggle, and the rise of the Communist Party to 'replace' it. Murphy showed the baselessness of Dutt's views, referring to him as one who 'sees the Labour movement from the newspapers, as one reading from afar, and impatiently dismisses the Labour Party as finished' Dutt reaffirmed his view that the strengthening of the Communist Party and of the Labour Party were mutually incompatible aims, and referred to the resolutions of the Fifth Comintern Congress for backing. Murphy rejoined that it was not the task of the CPGB 'to split the Labour Party, although a split may be forced upon the Labour Party by the reactionaries, but certainly not by us': and commented shrewdly on the 'non-historical approach to the question and the Leftist kink which repeatedly manifests itself in Comrade Dutt's outbursts' **(CI,** nos 8, 9, 11, 12 (new series).) The Comintern's swing to the Right in 1925 deprived Dutt's special flair of any immediate bearing upon policy. In 1928-29, however, when the needs of the faction fight inside the CPSU, together with the disastrous failure of the Right zigzag of 1925-27, dictated a sharp swing to the Left in the parties of the Comintern, and some of the British communist leaders were dragging their feet, then Dutt came into his own, as the high priest of the 'fight against social-fascism'. (See J. Redman, **The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-29** (1957).)

The call for increased powers for the General Council had been an element in communist policy since 1922, and from the beginning the necessity of associating such an increase of power with an increase of control from below had been stressed. Thus, Pollitt had written in the *LM* of November 1923 that 'a real General Council must be established, with power to direct the whole movement, and not only with power, but under responsibility to Congress to use that power and direct the movement on the lines laid down each year by Congress'. J. R. Campbell, too, as editor of the NMM paper *The Worker*, had warned in an article in the *CR* of May 1924 that the slogan of 'More Power to the General Council' might be taken up by elements who wished to see the General Council not co-ordinating struggles but stifling forward movements; the only answer to this danger was to strengthen the militant spirit and control from below. The communist fraction at Trades Union Congresses worked steadily in this direction; e.g., it was they who secured that the General Council's annual report should be issued to delegates seven days prior to Congress, instead of, as previously, when they took their seats.[32]

The successes achieved by the National Minority Movement in connexion with the strike wave of 1924, which was on a bigger scale than that of 1923, stimulated a reaction on the part of the trade union bureaucracy. This took two forms. The bureaucracy as a whole, hitherto lukewarm, compared with the "politicians", on the question of excluding communists from the Labour Party, quite suddenly became galvanized into support for MacDonald on this issue—hence the decision of the 1924 Conference of the Labour Party attempting to close the door on individual membership by communists.[33] Part of the bureaucracy, however, while in no way linking up with the Minority Movement, began to adapt themselves to the increasingly Left mood of the workers by striking Left-wing attitudes, more particularly on international questions such as relations with the USSR. The initial response of the communists was to welcome this latter development as a reflection of the more militant mood among the workers, while guarding against the attribution of too much practical significance to it. Thus, Campbell, in the *CR* of September 1924: 'It would be a suicidal policy, however, for the Communist Party and the Minority Movement to place too much reliance on what we have called the official Left wing'. The transformation of the trade union movement was still the main thing: 'The formation of workshop committees will provide a necessary means of counteracting the bureaucracy'. And Dutt, in the *LM* of October 1924: 'A Left wing in the working class movement must be based upon the class struggle, or it becomes only a manoeuvre to confuse the workers.' The editorial in the *CR* of November 1924 was far from starry-eyed about the new 'Lefts':

> On the trade union field we find the Left wing in the main representative of the smaller unions, e.g., Purcell, Bromley, Hicks. In previous years such unions played a very small part. But the increased activity of the masses has made it possible for them to gain prominence and ultimately position [in the General Council] by expressing 'Left' sentiments on a number of popular subjects, e.g., Soviet Russia . . .

THE PARTY AND THE TUC 'LEFTS'

On the initiative of the newly emergent Lefts among the top leadership of the trade unions, the Trades Union Congress of 1924 decided to send a delegation to the USSR. The delegation visited Russia in November-December 1924 and issued its report in February 1925. A paean of praise for the Stalinist régime, this report was written by the delegation's expert advisers Harold Grenfell, A. R. McDonell and George Young, and the Labour Research Department's *Monthly Circular* for March 1925 remarked of it that 'the Report is in no sense to be taken as a work of critical Marxism, or even as something written from the normal trade union outlook. But just for this reason it is likely to have a special appeal to middle-class readers'. Another important aspect of the report can best be illustrated by means of an excerpt from the article 'Stalin: Slanders and Truth', by C. Allen, in the *CR* of January 1950:

> The trade union delegation that visited Russia in November 1924 recognized the bourgeois character of Trotsky. 'Trotsky, who only joined the party just in time to take a prominent part in the October Revolution, represents liberal non-conformity [in other words, capitalism—C.A.] as against die-hard communism'. (**Russia,** Official Report of the British Trades Union Delegation, London, 1925, p. 15).

The group of British trade union leaders who issued this report—Purcell, Hicks, Bromley, Swales—about the same time began to make speeches in favour of unity between the trade unions of the USSR and of Britain as a step towards international trade union unity.[34] Very rapidly thereafter the entire work of the British Communist Party came to be redirected so as to concentrate on support for this group of trade union leaders in their work for Anglo-Russian unity, any demands and activi-

[32] H. Pollitt, **CR,** October 1923.

[33] G. D. H. Cole, **A History of the Labour Party from 1914** (1948), pp. 146-7. See also **CR,** July 1924, on the extraordinary outburst of feeling against the communists on the part of trade union leaders in connexion with the railway strike of that period. The standing of the communists in the working-class movement at this time was still such (shown, e.g., in the tremendous protest against the arrest of J. R. Campbell, which indirectly brought about MacDonald's resignation; the endorsement and election of Saklatvala as a Labour candidate in Battersea; and the increase in the circulation of the **Workers' Weekly** to 100,000 during the election campaign) that the attempt to exclude them from the Labour Party remained largely inoperative until after the 1925 Conference, and even then met with the organized and determined resistance, through the formation of the National Left-Wing Movement, described in my pamphlet **The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-29.** It was only after the collapse of the General Strike that the exclusion policy could be put through on a grand scale; and by their policy change of 1928-29 the communists bolted on their own side the door that had been shut in their faces, voluntarily renouncing the prospect of getting the exclusion decision reversed.

[34] More than somewhat belatedly, in his introduction to Lozovsky's **British and Russian Workers,** published in the latter part of 1926, Pollitt reproached the Russian trade union leader for underestimating the significance of mass pressure led by the National Minority Movement as the decisive factor in this development. The NMM held a successful conference on international trade union unity in January 1925; the delegation to Russia 'had kept absolutely silent on the whole question of unity' from its departure from Russia in December till after this conference.

ties which might antagonize them being abandoned or played down. (As outlined in my article in the July-August LABOUR REVIEW, this change of orientation did not bring about Anglo-Russian unity or any other good thing—it led through the betrayal of the General Strike to the Arcos Raid.)

The keynote for the new period was sounded in the editorial in the *CR* of March 1925: 'The immediate task before the whole trade union movement in this country is the realization of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee'. Lozovsky, leader of the Red International of Labour Unions, wrote, in *The World's Trade Union Movement* (English edition, April 1925) that 'the plan of the Right wing is falling through. The British representatives, and particularly Purcell, have already gone far beyond the line marked out for them by the Right-wing leaders of the Amsterdam International', and, while noting that the Trades Union Congress had rejected the communist-sponsored 'unambiguous' resolution on international trade union unity, had 'made up for that' by endorsing Purcell's proposal that the General Council try to bring the various trends together: this was, comparatively speaking, a step forward. The speeches of Tomsky, leader of the Soviet trade unions, which were published in English,[35] radiated confidence in Purcell and Co. R. P. Dutt's Notes of the Month in the *LM* of May 1925 were devoted to the question of the working-class movement's attitude in the sphere of foreign relations, especially Anglo-Russian relations, and throughout the succeeding twelve months that journal was dominated by the question of Anglo-Russian trade union unity and allied matters.

The implications of this switch of attention quickly showed themselves. In the article by P. Braun on 'Problems of the Labour Movement', in the *LM* for June, international trade union unity and the need for increased powers for the General Council were put in the forefront, factory committees being mentioned almost as an afterthought—and they were to be set up 'with the backing of the General Council'. At the second annual conference of the National Minority Movement, in August, stress was laid on the granting of full powers to the General Council, with only a brief and vague reference to 'obligation . . . to use that power to fight more effectively the battles of the workers', contrasting with the careful indication of the need to develop the control from below, lest the General Council use any increase in its powers to betray the workers, which had been a feature of the previous year's decisions. Dutt's Notes of the Month in the *LM* for September left nothing to chance, stressing the need for increased powers for the General Council without even a formal warning or qualification. The helpless trailing behind Purcell and Co. to which the Communist Party was now reduced found pitiful expression in Dutt's Notes of the Month in the *LM* for November, where he tried to explain away the fact that Purcell and Co., those great Left-wingers, the darling of the Kremlin, had not lifted a finger to prevent the exclusion of the communists from the Labour Party when this was reaffirmed at the Liverpool conference in 1925. They had 'failed even to attempt to put up a fight'; the trouble was that they lacked 'self-confidence', and 'to overcome this weakness' was 'an essential task for the future'. Wagging his finger, Dutt told these future betrayers of the General Strike that they had . . . 'acted very foolishly'. At the enlarged plenum of the Comintern executive in February 1926, George Hardy could cheerfully answer foreign comrades who wondered whether the campaign for 'All Power to the General Council' unlinked with a struggle for democratizing the unions, and with factory committees still 'music of the future', might not prove misconceived, by saying: 'Should they use that power wrongly, it only means that we have got another additional task before us of forcing them in the right direction, which direction they must ultimately take.'[36]

This political misorientation was the reason why, in spite of Red Friday and all that followed, the fiasco of the General Strike could nevertheless occur. It is heart-rending to observe how strongly the tide was running in favour of the Communist Party in the latter part of 1925 and in the opening months of 1926, when one knows what was to come. The arrest of some of the communist leaders in October 1925 evoked a wave of protest and indignation that dwarfed the reaction to the 'Campbell case' of the previous year. In spite of the anti-communist decision just passed at Liverpool, the Miners' Federation headed the list of protesting organizations. While Wally Hannington was in jail he was elected to the executive committee of the London Trades Council. Every weekend great marches to Wandsworth prison took place, to cheer up the 'class-war prisoners' with revolutionary songs. The *Annual Register* for 1925 records how the widespread agitation for the release of the Twelve culminated 'in a great demonstration at the Queen's Hall, London, at which some Labour MPs ostentatiously used language which they held to be seditious in order to provoke the Home Secretary to have them arrested'. A petition for the release of the prisoners secured 300,000 signatures. Among those who stood bail for the Twelve during their trial were Lady Warwick and G. B. Shaw. MacDonald was provoked by all this to write to *The Times* asking 'What good is it our fighting Bolshevism if it is to be manufactured by the Government?'[37]

The leaders of the CPGB both underestimated the workers and overestimated the 'Left' trade union leaders. 'Not one of us as we emerged from Wandsworth [three weeks before the strike began—J.R.] thought there would be such an event' as the General Strike, writes J. T. Murphy, who was one of the Twelve, in his autobiography.[38] And, on the impact of the sell-out by

[35] M. Tomsky, **Getting Together** (Speeches, 1924-25), published by the Labour Research Department, with an introduction by R. P. Arnot, 1925.

[36] **Orders from Moscow?** (CPGB, 1926). After the terrible damage had been done, Dutt by implication criticized the glossing over in 1925-26 of the issue of structural reform of the trade unions which had been put in the forefront in 1922-24. In his Notes of the Month in the **LM** for September 1926, he looked back at the Scarborough TUC of a year before, to exclaim upon 'the monstrously unrepresentative character of the existing trade union machinery. Had there existed a real Congress directly elected by the whole organized working-class movement, and had that Congress been able in its turn to elect by free vote a real leadership for the coming struggles and expressing its outlook, the history of the next twelve months would have been different.'

[37] On this episode, see E. H. Brown, 'The Persecution of the CPGB', in **CI,** no 18 (new series).

[38] J. T. Murphy, **New Horizons** (1941), p. 220.

Purcell and his associates, the editorial in the *CR* of August 1926 declared: 'This treachery, unexpected and fatal, was greater than the certain and expected treason of Thomas.' Throughout the international communist movement the calling off of the strike came as 'a surprise and a shock'.[39]

THE COMINTERN LEADERSHIP AND THE CPGB

Why did the Comintern leadership adopt, in the early months of 1925, the policy of unlimited confidence in the Purcell group and subordination of the British Communist Party to the convenience of this group? The 'imminent revolutionary developments' prospect of 1924 failed to justify itself. Already at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern Zinoviev hinted that perhaps the British Communist Party was not, after all, going to become a tremendous force in the immediate future, and if the Russians wanted to see big things happen forthwith in Britain they had better seek other instruments.[40] Before 1924 was out, Trotsky warned against the kind of manoeuvre to which the bankruptcy of the current ultra-Left policy could easily lead: 'Opportunism expresses itself not only in moods of gradualism but also in political impatience: it frequently seeks to reap where it has not sown, to realize successes which do not correspond to its influence.'[41] He himself saw the way forward in Britain as lying through a steady growth in the influence of the CPGB: 'Slowly (much more slowly than we should wish) but irresistibly, British communism is undermining MacDonald's conservative strongholds.'[42]

By the end of 1924, signs of a new trend in Stalin's views on the international working-class movement became apparent, following upon his declaration of the possibility of building socialism in isolated Russia. In December, in his preface to *On the Road to October*, he wrote of Trotsky's being infatuated with the necessity for a revolution in the Western countries and underestimating the effectiveness of the 'moral support' already being given by the workers of western Europe to Soviet Russia.[43] Here already is the germ of the Anglo-Russian Committee and the policy based upon it, the scrapping of the CPGB as an independent revolutionary force. In January 1925, while emphasizing that the international proletariat was showing itself 'tardy in making a revolution', he spoke of what he called the 'incipient split between the General Council of the TUC and the Labour Party' as a sign that 'something revolutionary . . . is developing in Britain'.[44] (Here the apparent contradiction is resolved if one interprets 'revolutionary' in the latter quotation as meaning for Stalin 'favourable to the defence of the Soviet Union conceived as something quite distinct from the revolution'.) Interviewed by a German communist in February 1925, Stalin spoke of a measure of stabilization having been achieved by German capitalism and placed a question-mark over the immediate possibility of revolution in Germany.[45] Allying himself with Bukharin, Stalin was now moving against the super-Leftist Zinoviev, that specialist in cheap pseudo-revolutionary optimism. In *Pravda* of March 22, 1925 he declared flatly that capital had 'extricated itself from the quagmire of the post-war crisis', 'the positive trends that are favourable for capitalism' were 'gaining the upper hand' and there was a 'a sort of lull'.[46]

A year earlier it had been the rankest 'Trotskyism' to speak of stabilization; now however—just when signs of the break-up of the stabilization of 1924 were beginning to appear in a number of countries, notably Britain and China—Stalin inscribed 'stabilization' on his banner and launched a struggle against all who questioned it. The task of the March-April 1925 plenum of the Comintern executive was to convey this new orientation to the parties and ensure their acceptance of it. The wretched Zinoviev did his best, but produced a speech of extraordinary confusion, trying to conceal the fact that the new line constituted a repudiation of that which he had promulgated at the Fifth Comintern Congress. One of the Czechoslovak delegates, Kreibich, drew attention to the contradictions in Zinoviev's speech and referred him to Stalin's *Pravda* article of March 22 for a correct exposition of the new set-up! So far as Britain was concerned, Lozovsky, in his speech at this plenum, clearly presented all the party's tasks as revolving around the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee then just being formed: this was to be the meaning of 'stabilization' for the CPGB. What should have been only a tactical episode, temporary and auxiliary in character, was made to determine the entire strategical line of the British communists for a long period ahead.[47] 'Stabilization' was to be the basic assumption and framework of Comintern policy thereafter for two and a half years—a period that saw mighty mass upsurges in Britain and China, contradicting 'stabilization', and betrayed by Purcell and Chiang Kai-shek respectively thanks to the policy of the Comintern under Stalin's leadership.[48]

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[39] **CI,** January 30, 1927, article on the world-wide solidarity campaign.

[40] Passage quoted in my article in **Labour Review,** July-August 1957. R. W. Postgate drew attention in **Plebs** for March 1925 to the significance of this passage when Zinoviev's speech was reprinted by the CPGB under the title **Towards TU Unity!**

[41] Trotsky, Introduction to **The First Five Years,** vol. 1.

[42] Trotsky, **Prospects and Tasks in the East** (1924).

[43] Stalin, **op. cit.** pp. 374 ff.

[44] **Ibid.** vol. 7, pp. 11 ff., 21, 26.

[45] **Ibid.** pp. 34 ff.

[46] **Ibid.** pp. 51ff.

[47] **Bolshevising the Communist International** (1925). The letter of May 8, 1925, from the Comintern section supervising work in the Co-operative movement to the Co-operative fraction of the CPGB (Document no 17 in Cmd 2682 of 1926, documents confiscated in a police raid on 16 King Street) listed 'support for the actions of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee' first among the urgent tasks of British Co-operators.

[48] That the revolutionary movement was going through 'a period of ebb' was reaffirmed by Stalin at the Fourteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, in December 1925. Not the revolution, but 'the workers' confidence in our State', to be secured by visits from delegations such as the British TUC delegation, was 'the fundamental antidote to imperialism and its interventionist machinations'. **(Works,** vol. 7, pp. 271, 291.) The enlarged plenum of the Comintern executive held in February 1926 once again reaffirmed this estimate (see **CR,** April 1926, and **LM,** May 1926).

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST 'TROTSKYISM'

The fact that after more than a year of disastrous make-believe the Soviet bureaucracy was forced to recognize stabilization—just as it was coming to an end in two of the principal centres of the capitalist world—did not, of course, mean that those who had faced the facts from the beginning now enjoyed any more friendly treatment—quite the reverse. Following the March-April 1925 plenum of the Comintern executive, a joint session of this body and the central committee of the Soviet Communist Party was held for the purpose of launching a new drive against 'Trotskyism', heralded by a speech from Bukharin, who had now replaced the discredited Zinoviev as the chief spokesman of the Stalin faction. Facilities for reply were increasingly restricted, but Trotsky still managed to voice his criticism of the new official line, even though only indirectly and allusively. His book *Where Is Britain Going?*, written in early 1925, had for its central theme the indispensability of building a strong Communist Party in Britain, which must combine flexibility of tactics and appreciation of the peculiarities of the British Labour movement with the maintenance of political independence and revolutionary principle. Deviations by British communists, in the early years, in the direction of sectarianism, had been opposed and corrected by the Soviet communists; now any tendency towards opportunism and tailism should likewise be resisted—certainly not encouraged.

In his last article in the *CI*[49] Trotsky urged the British communists to learn from the experience of the Russian Revolution: 'Ready at any moment to act with the Left wing against all attempts at counter-revolution, the [Bolshevik] party at the same time [in 1917] pursued a ruthless ideological struggle against the parties which, against their will, found themselves "heading the revolution". It was only this that made October possible.' Why had not the Left wing in the TUC General Council played a greater role in the Labour Party? 'The party continues to be led by extreme Right-wingers. This is to be explained by the fact that the party cannot be restricted to various Left sallies, but is bound to have a finished system of politics . . . In order to rally their ranks, the Left-wingers will first of all have to collect their thoughts. The best of them are only capable of doing this under the blows of ruthless criticism based on the everyday experience of the masses.' The divorce between words and deeds, benign gestures towards Russia and indifference or worse to the class struggle in Britain, must be exposed and broken down. On this it depended whether the Communist Party would 'come through the first revolutionary stage at the head of the working masses, as we did in 1905, or . . . let slip the opportunity of the revolutionary situation as the German party did in 1923. This latter danger is extremely real. It may be diminished only by aiding the Left wing to find its proper orientation for action (the *real* Left Wing and not Lansbury or Purcell).'[50]

Replying (in an article written on May 3, 1926, but not published in *International Press Correspondence* until June) to a criticism by Bertrand Russell of his *Where Is Britain Going?*, Trotsky dealt with the idea that the policies of the Communist Parties should be subordinated to the alleged requirements of the 'defence of the Soviet Union'. Though he discussed this question in relation to the rebuke given by Lenin and himself to the German comrades who tried in 1921 to justify their artificial and premature attempt at revolution by the need to protect the Soviet Republic from renewed intervention at the time of Kronstadt, the following words were well understood by informed readers to bear also upon the holding back of the workers' movement, on the pretext of safeguarding Soviet interests, which was characteristic of the epoch in which Trotsky was writing: 'It would be essentially wrong to believe that the proletariat of any country ought to take any steps whatever in the interests of the Soviet State which do not arise from its own interests as a class which is fighting for its complete emancipation'.

The full story of how the leadership of the British Communist Party put itself completely in the hands of the Stalin faction in 1925 will only become known, if ever, on the basis of personal reminiscences. It is possible, however, to trace some of the outlines from the printed records. The *CR* for February 1924 carried an article surveying the discussions in the Soviet Communist Party which gave a fair presentation of the views of Trotsky and Preobrazhensky. The *LM* of the same date carried a similarly objective and balanced report. Even after the resolution of the Thirteenth Conference of the Soviet Communist Party, condemning the 'factional' activities of Trotsky and classifying 'Trotskyism' as a petty-bourgeois deviation, had been published[51] the *LM* featured (July 1924), an article by Trotsky,[52] though, it be sure, it was one that did not relate to the current disputes. As the campaign against 'Trotskyists' got under way in the Comintern, however, and assumed the form of dismissal and expulsion of officials of Communist Parties, King Street appears to have seen the red light. Anti-'Trotskyist' writings began to appear in British communist publications with increasing frequency, starting with an Alice-in-Wonderland exposition of the issues by Tom Bell in *Workers' Weekly* of December 5, entitled 'The Truth About Trotsky' ('Needless to say, the ideas of Comrade Trotsky found ready support among the bureaucrats . . .'). A resolution denouncing Trotsky was sent to Moscow. This aroused some uneasiness among a section of the membership, and at an all-London aggregate in January a motion was put forward regretting the 'hasty' action of the leadership. The mover, A. E. Reade, was so rash as to quote Lenin's 'Testament' to the meeting: A. Rothstein

[49] 'Problems of the British Labour Movement', **CI**, no 22 (new series).

[50] The materials constituting this article were written between December 1925 and March 1926, but the **CI** did not publish it until after the General Strike. The article 'Problems of the British Labour Movement', like the book **Where is Britain Going?**, deserves reprinting. (A resolution of the central committee of the CPGB, protesting against this article, and condemning Trotsky's call for the Soviet trade unions to withdraw demonstratively from the Anglo-Russian Committee, was printed in the **Workers' Weekly** for August 13, 1926.)

[51] **CR**, April 1924.

[52] On H. G. Wells's interview with Lenin in 1920.

rose to dismiss this document as 'a gross forgery'. R. P. Arnot explained that the Trotsky opposition was an affair of a few students, of no concern to the Russian workers (cf. similar 'explanations' of the Hungarian rising in 1956!), and the leadership got away with it, only 15 votes being cast against their action in a house of 200-odd. The same issue (January 23, 1925) of the *Workers' Weekly* in which the report of this aggregate appeared carried an article affirming that 'those few comrades in our party who think that our executive committee should not have adopted any decision until it (or even until the whole party membership) had become acquainted with the full text of Trotsky's book [i.e., *Lessons of October*—J.R.], instead of with a summary as was actually the case, only show that they have a terrible deal to learn yet before they become real communists . . .' (cf. Pollitt's reply to critics of hastiness in condemnation of Tito in 1948). A piece by Bukharin attacking Trotsky (described in the editorial comment as 'a brilliant contribution to the theory and practice of Leninism') was published in the *CR* for February 1925. British communists were reminded of the urgent importance of remedying the inadequacy of their exposure of 'Trotskyism' in a letter from the Agitprop Department of the Comintern executive dated February 24.[53] In March the *CR* reproduced a fresh resolution of the central committee of the Soviet Communist Party directed against Trotsky: this showed, commented the editorial board, 'that the Communist Party of Russia still remains a real Bolshevik Party, firm in its decisions, merciless in its discipline and united to the core'.

The Comintern executive meeting of March-April 1925 gave special attention to the danger of 'Trotskyism' and the need to fight against it. Tom Bell reported that the British Communist Party had 'followed the whole discussion around what is called Trotskyism', and had 'no hesitation' in associating itself with the Soviet party leadership. He added a snarl at 'intellectuals' who admired Trotsky, contrasting them with 'workers' who understood the need for 'discipline', and threw in a jeer at Trotsky's 'paper plans' for industrialization. Following this meeting a regular anti-Trotsky campaign was opened up in the British Communist Press. The *LM* of April 1925 contained a review by W. N. Ewer of Trotsky's biography of Lenin. Headed: 'The Twilight of Trotsky', the review described *Lenin* as being 'as pathetic a book as was ever unwisely given to the world', 'the book of a sick man consoling himself by telling himself stories of his own great past'. 'It is not good to look upon a strong man in the day of his sickness and mental weakness'. A similarly hostile review, by Arthur MacManus, appeared in the *CR* for May. It was not so easy to get away with this sort of thing in Britain, however, and no small embarrassment was caused by J. F. Horrabin's pointing out in the May *Plebs* that a section of the book now being rejected as worthless had been published in the *LM* ('Trotsky on Wells') as recently as the previous July: 'But that was before the party ukase against Trotsky had gone forth.'[54]

However, the Comintern 'ukase' had to be carried out, and May 1925 also saw the appearance of the book *The Errors of Trotskyism*, in which writings against Trotsky by Stalin, Kuusinen and others were assembled, with an introduction by J. T. Murphy. Virtuously, this British communist leader (himself to be expelled in 1932) rebutted the charge by supporters of Trotsky that 'the present leaders were and are opposed to party democracy, when such was and is not the case.' The *CR* for June printed a new speech by Bukharin against Trotskyism, and the *LM* of the same date a review by R. P. Dutt of Eastman's *Since Lenin Died*, ridiculing the picture there given of a bureaucracy, against whom Lenin had warned, intriguing against good communists. People who wrote such things were disloyal to the working class.[55] In *Plebs* for August Gallacher sounded off against Trotsky's 'egotism'.

The knowing grins of anti-communist commentators compelled the adoption of a less obviously pre-fabricated attitude, a little more subtlety. This became particularly urgent when a translation of Trotsky's *Where Is Britain Going*? appeared in America[56] and at once attracted much attention in the Labour movement here (an extract was given in *Plebs* for October 1925). In the *LM* for November and December an article entitled 'Towards Capitalism or Socialism?' by L. D. Trotsky was printed. Actually, this was merely the first, introductory section of the work with this title, published some months earlier in Russia, and contained nothing controversial: the critique of Bukharin's policy which constituted the main point of *Towards Capitalism or Socialism*? was in the later sections, which were omitted without acknowledgement by the *LM*![57] The *LM* for April 1926 carried a review by R. P. Dutt of Trotsky's book on Britain—which, while fulsomely praising the author's brilliance, etc., failed completely to relate the book to the current situation and omitted to discuss the very topical criticisms of the party line that were implicit in it.

When the Communist Party at last brought out an edition of its own of *Where Is Britain Going*? it omitted the preface specially written by Trotsky for the American edition in May 1925, which included these words: 'The inference to which I am led by my study is that Britain is heading rapidly towards an era of great revolutionary upheavals'; and, though giving the bulk of the introduction written in May 1926 for the second German edition, it omitted the word 'revolutionary' from the phrase 'the revolutionary prediction for the

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[53]Document no 14 in Cmd 2682 of 1926.

[54]Ewer had also reviewed Trotsky's book in the **Daily Herald** —carrying inner-party controversy into the non-party Press! —and there had written of Trotsky as 'a senile colonel gabbling in an armchair'.

[55]**The Workers' Weekly** of May 8 devoted a whole page to an excoriation of Eastman ('Since Eastman Lies'). According to a letter by Eastman in **Lansbury's Labour Weekly** of August 29, he sent to the **LM** a reply to the attacks on his book which had appeared in the communist Press: the editor had accepted this, subject to approval by the party's political bureau, but the latter had refused permission for it to be published.

[56]Under the title **Whither England?**

[57]When the full text of **Towards Capitalism or Socialism?** was published in book form in the following year by Messrs. Methuen, Maurice Dobb gave it a hostile review in **Plebs** of October 1926. Trotsky, he pointed out, led the 'industrialist' wing of the Soviet Communist Party, a wrong-headed lot; his plans for industrializing the USSR were 'the stuff that dreams are made on'.

immediate future of British imperialism made in this book' and also an entire paragraph which included these words: 'The most important task for the truly revolutionary participants in the General Strike will be to fight relentlessly against every sign or act of treachery, and ruthlessly to expose reformist illusions.' It was understandable that the CPGB leadership should be shy of Trotsky's views on the immediate prospect in Britain in 1925-26, for about the same time as his book first appeared it had held a Congress which 'gave no countenance to the revolutionary optimism of those who hold that we are on the eve of immediate vast revolutionary struggles. It recognized that capitalism had stabilized itself temporarily'. (*Workers' Weekly*, June 5, 1925)

THE BUREAUCRATIC DEGENERATION OF THE CPGB

By the beginning of 1926 the CPGB had acquired the reputation, in spite of its small size, of being a model section of the Comintern, in one very important respect. The resolution of the enlarged plenum of the Comintern executive held in February praised the 'absence of factional struggles in the British party'.[58] In this respect the CPGB offered a striking contrast to many other constituent parties of the Comintern, and it was to retain and consolidate this characteristic of exceptional readiness to follow the latest Moscow line. Even in 1929, Campbell, Rothstein and the others who at first resisted the 'Third Period' swing to the Left came to heel as soon as they saw that the Comintern meant business. The Murphy and 'Balham Group' affairs in 1932 were teacup-storms by Continental or American standards. (It complements this relative docility of the British Communist Party that in this country 'Trotskyism' developed in the nineteen-thirties mainly outside the ranks of communists and ex-communists, through the ILP). The factors determining this docility were doubtless many, and at present one can only speculate on the basis of insufficient material. Of some importance, probably, was the circumstance that the reorganization of 1923 equipped a small, poor party with a top-heavy hierarchy of full-time officials. In the atmosphere of international bureaucratic centralism as it developed from 1923 onwards these officials evolved a close-knit freemasonry, based on unquestioning loyalty to the Comintern leadership. As it grew more and more apparent that, if only because of the Comintern-imposed policy, the CPGB was *not* going to lead a revolution in Britain, the importance of conformity to the current Moscow line, as against respect for Marxist principle or the facts of the situation in Britain, would acquire increasing weight. There is evidence, moreover, that already by 1925 the financial aid of the Comintern, funnelled through Petrovsky-Bennett, Moscow's representative with the CPGB, was providing essential support for the party 'machine'.[59]

Whatever the details of the mechanism of control, it is plain that the Soviet bureaucracy contrived to secure the connivance of the CPGB officials in transforming what in 1922-24 had been a party full of promise of becoming the Marxist leadership of the British workers, into a servile instrument of their will that they were thenceforth able to use as they fancied, ruining it, in the process, as a Communist Party in the true original sense. As Trotsky wrote in his *Letter on the Work of the British Section* in May 1933, 'the study and critical examination of the policy of the British Communist Party in the last eight or ten years', or 'even the mere selection of the most striking quotations and the presentation of them in chronological order, would lay bare not only the glaring contradictions of the "general line" but also the inner logic of those contradictions, i.e., the violent vacillations of the Centrist bureaucracy [of the Soviet Communist Party] between opportunism and adventurism. Every one of those tactical zigzags pushed communists, sympathizers and potential friends back, to the right, to the left, and finally into the swamp of indifference. We can say, without the least exaggeration, that the British Communist Party has become a political thoroughfare . . .' Far too many of those who have passed along that 'political thoroughfare' have set off from it in the direction of indifference or even enmity to Marxism-Leninism and the heritage of the October Revolution and of the first four Congresses of the Comintern. Study of the history of the party which has disappointed them may perhaps help some recent ex-communists to understand the real causes of its degeneration and enable them to find a better path.

[58] **Orders from Moscow?** See also **LM**, May 1926.

[59] Cmd 2682 of 1926 and Cmd 3125 of 1928.

Empiricist Philosophy and Empiricist Habits of Thinking – I

John Marshall

THE term 'empiricism' is often used in the literature of Marxism but its exact meaning is not always understood. Empiricism refers both to a specific type of philosophy occupying a particular place in the history of modern thought, and to habits of thinking which the empiricist uses. These two aspects, of course, co-exist and this article seeks to show the way in which they are inter-related.

It is proposed to give answers to the following questions:

(1) What role has empiricism played in Western philosophy and what did it accomplish?

(2) What did empiricism teach?

(3) How did empiricist philosophy develop and what distinguishes the modern empiricist, i.e., what habits of thought nurture and are nurtured by empiricism?

(4) What attitude does dialectical materialism take toward this school of philosophy?

THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF EMPIRICISM

Britain has one of the oldest capitalist cultures and empiricism is a characteristic product of that culture. Since the seventeenth century, empiricism, in one form or another, has been the major philosophy of the English-speaking peoples on both sides of the Atlantic. Its long dominance coincides with the period of bourgeois rule in Britain and its radiation to other parts of the world.

The connexion between the philosophical method of empiricism and the social system of capitalism is not an accidental connexion but an organic one. In its theoretical content, empiricism is a view of the world. It performs a definite social function, acting as a method of thinking appropriate to the specific historical conditions and serving the class requirements of the bourgeoisie. The periods of the birth, maturity and senescence of empiricism are bound up with the rise and decay of the bourgeois mode of existence.

Empiricism in its youth was an integral part of the mightiest technological, economic, political, scientific, artistic and philosophical revolution England has yet experienced. This many-sided revolutionary transformation of Britain arose from the commercial and industrial advances which enabled the British bourgeoisie to establish capitalist economy and establish its political rule in the seventeenth century.

Empiricism was born as the philosophical challenge of the budding bourgeois society to the scholastic, Roman Catholic ideological superstructure of feudal society. The religious side of this process began with Wycliffe and Lollardry, continued through the Reformation of the English Church and its break with Rome, and culminated in Puritanism. Empiricism drew many of its key ideas from the new world outlook stimulated by the new phase in the natural sciences identified with such figures as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Huyghens, Boyle, Harvey and Newton.

Empiricism, however, was not the most revolutionary theoretical product of this period. A substantial school of materialists held the most advanced outposts. Yet empiricism was, in its origins, an extremely radical departure in the field of philosophy.

Classical British empiricism, from Bacon to Hume, acted as a powerful stimulant to progress in Western thought. It challenged many medieval ideas, shattered scholasticism and dislodged many old props of feudal theology. It sought to devise a new logic and a more fruitful method of investigation of natural phenomena, of society and of human reasoning processes to replace the formal logic and sterile speculations of the scholastics. It aided the revival of materialism and helped to clear the ground for the growth of the natural and social sciences. Empiricism proved an invaluable theoretical tool in the tasks of destruction and renovation undertaken by the bourgeois-democratic forces of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Empiricism thus won a lasting place in the historical development of modern thought. Its successes have been so great and the influence of its methods and ideas so widespread and enduring that they have entered into the very bloodstream of British culture, until now they appear to many people as the normal, natural, eternal attributes of all human reasoning.

BACON: THE INSPIRER OF EMPIRICISM

All the power and promise inherent in empiricism was contained in the writings of Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the illustrious innovator of modern philosophy. Bacon may be regarded as the father of British materialism and the grandfather of empiricism.

Bacon set British philosophy on a new road in the following ways:

(1) By a very 'back-handed' concession to theology he severed 'natural philosophy' from religion by maintaining that humans could not know God's nature by means of reason or sensation but only through revelation of his inspired word. By being separated from theology, natural science was allocated a definite territory of its own in which it could expand more freely. Unintentionally, but none the less effectively for that, Bacon initiated a process of differentiating philosophy and science from theology which, when carried forward by later thinkers, undermined the theological foundations of religious dogmas and so cleared a path for materialist and even directly atheist conclusions.

(2) By divorcing philosophy from theology and reason from faith, Bacon joined the new philosophy to natural science in the form of a materialist physics. He directed men's attention away from the barren scholastic

learning of the universities[1] towards outdoor study and direct observation of natural phenomena.

(3) Bacon proceeded from a materialist conception of nature which viewed matter as indestructible, self-moving, ever-active and constantly changing. Although God had created nature, he did not interfere with its causal order.

(4) Bacon based his philosophy not upon metaphysics (i.e., upon learned disputes about the meanings of terms or unverifiable abstractions) but upon methodical investigation of 'the universal process of motion', (i.e., upon physics, especially mechanics).

(5) Bacon set out a new logical method which relied not upon the 'vicious habit' of jumping to unverified general propositions and deducing consequences from them, but which relied upon the method of making narrow general propositions from observed data and then, step by step, moving from these narrow generalizations to broader generalizations and checking them at every stage by reference to the results of experiment.

(6) This empirical and inductive method, depending upon the observation of nature, inquiry and experiment rather than upon abstract propositions, stressed workability instead of formal consistency as the test of truth. 'What is most useful in practice is most correct in theory,' Bacon wrote. 'For truth is shown and proved by the evidence of works . . .'

(7) Bacon switched the main function of philosophy from providing theoretical arguments for religious dogmas to serving the practical needs of mankind. The increased knowledge of nature acquired through Bacon's innovations in scientific method were used to promote useful works, to stimulate mechanical inventions (e.g., printing, gunpowder, the magnetic compass) which, because they advanced the efficiency and power of the instruments of production, augment wealth and help to satisfy more effectively men's needs and even to increase their comforts. Bacon declared his aim when he wrote that he was seeking 'the knowledge of Causes, and Secret Motions of Things; and the Enlarging of bounds of Humane Empire to the effecting of all things possible.'

These aims corresponded to the basic requirements of the emerging bourgeois order. Bacon sought to devise 'an engine' of thought adequate for the social practices of the new era. His theorizing heralded the coming industrial revolution. He announced that wedding of natural science and industry which has showered so many benefits upon mankind.

For Bacon experience, based upon what we learn through the senses and aids to the senses like the telescope, was the sole valid source and sure road to useful knowledge. These tendencies in his thought bore fruit in various ways in the seventeenth century. During the Civil War, the materialism he pioneered acquired an aristocratic and monarchist form in the hands of his companion Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and a plebeian and democratic expression in the Leveller leader Richard Overton (1597-1663).

[1]The method of developing men's knowledge of the world adopted by the scholastic philosophy was to take a general proposition of, usually, Aristotle, and to construct an account of the world by purely deductive methods—i.e., by deducing what the world 'must' be like on the unquestioned and unquestionable assumption that Aristotle's general proposition was **absolutely** correct. There are, of course, modern scholastics and they are not always to be found in theological seminaries.

THE CLASSICAL EMPIRICISM OF LOCKE

The purely empirical aspect of Bacon's thought was developed later in the century and under different circumstances by John Locke.

John Locke (1632-1704) was the founder of the empirical school of philosophy. The empiricists did not have to produce any comprehensive cosmological theory of their own. They simply took over the mechanical conception of the world ready-made from the natural scientists of the seventeenth century. They aimed to create a theory of knowledge in tune with the premises of natural science and to extend the methods of thought which were achieving such brilliant results in the natural sciences to the problems of philosophy and to the study of mankind.

Empiricism is not based so much upon a particular view of the real world as upon a statement concerning the ways and means of acquiring knowledge of the world. It is in fact a special theory of knowledge—an epistemological theory. *The primary principle of empiricism is that all knowledge is founded on experience of the senses.* Hobbes states that sensation was the principle of the knowledge of principles themselves and all science is derived from that source.

Locke approached the problem of the origins and basis of knowledge along the same line. He wrote:

> Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? . . . To this I answer in one word, from experience: in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself.

This proposition was directed against the idealist theory, propounded in Locke's time by, among others, the Cambridge Platonists, that knowledge is somehow drawn from innate notions implanted in the mind before birth and deriving ultimately from God, their author. Thus, in 1660, in a discourse called *Of the Immortality of the Soul*, one of these Cambridge Platonists, John Smith, spoke about

> The Archetypall Ideas of Justice, Wisdome, Goodness, Truth, Eternity, Omnipotency, and all these either Morall, Physicall or Metaphysical notions, which are either the First Principles of Science or the ultimate complement and final perfection of it. These we always find to be the same and know that no Exorcisms of material mutation have any power over them; though we ourselves are but of yesterday and mutable every moment; yet these are Eternall and depend not upon any mundane vicissitudes; neither could we ever gather them from our observation of any Material thing where they were never sown.

Referring to such 'Eternall Archetypall Ideas', Locke remarked:

> It is an established opinion among some men that there are in the understanding certain innate principles, some primary notions, characters, as it were, stamped upon the mind of man, which the soul receives in its very first being and brings into the world with it.

Locke set out to demolish this supposition of the Platonists but, as we shall see, only partly succeeded in this task.

THE ORIGINAL SOURCE OF IDEAS

Locke relies on plain empirical evidence, or the absence of it, to disprove the existence of innate ideas. If there were self-evident truths, he argued, these should be present in all men and clear to savages, infants and even idiots. In fact, this is not so; the supposed innate principles in religion, logic, morals and mathematics are consciously held only by educated minds.

This theory of empiricism is true so far as it goes. However, it cannot be said to provide a complete theory of knowledge. Whatever ideas or knowledge we have do ultimately derive from physical contacts with the world around us, through our senses.

This is denied by proponents of the idealist school who teach that some, if not all, of our ideas come from an immaterial source. They have used this doctrine to uphold the existence of eternal and self-evident truths in religion, morals and logic. Ever since this view was expressed in classical Greece by such philosophers as Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, the idealists have held up mathematics as the surest evidence that general ideas could not possibly be taken from sense experience. Berkeley tells us: 'Number is no object of sense; it is an act of the mind.'

Dr Whewell, an English historian of science of the early nineteenth century, maintained, following Plato, that such propositions as two and three make five are 'necessary truths', i.e., truths which have a certainty, universality and stability mere experience could not give. John Stuart Mill replied that this simple arithmetical statement expresses 'a truth known to us by early and constant experience . . . which rests on the evidence of sense'.

The empiricist Mill was right on this point against the Kantian idealist Whewell. The 'early and constant experience' out of which simple arithmetic emerged and on which it is based, belongs not only to childhood but to the childhood of mankind. The art of counting originated among the savages through their handling and observation of definite objects for specific social purposes. If there were no such objects in men's ordinary experience of the world they live in, there would be no need or use for the art and science of enumeration. Numbers are still taught to children by pointing to their fingers and toes, beads, blocks and so on—that is to say, through the evidence provided by their organs and senses of touch and sight.

There are some primitives who cannot count beyond ten and have no special words in their language for numbers greater than five. Our own decimal numeration testifies to its lowly origins and bodily basis, since we reckon by tens in accord with the primitive practice of depending upon fingers and toes for calculation. Today, in the construction of electronic calculators, mathematicians find the binary system, i.e., one using a base of two, to be most suitable.

Similarly, other mathematical concepts and methods may be traced back to their sensory and social roots. Thus the very evidence which the idealists bring forward to prove the immaterial sources of ideas may be used to show the truth of the empirical assertion of their earthly origins.

The persistence, however, of the belief in the immaterial origin of mathematics is demonstrated by the fact that Hume, the otherwise ruthlessly consistent sensationalist, puts mathematical propositions, including arithmetic, into a different class from ideas about matters of fact. He assigns them to a category of purely abstract 'Relations of Ideas' which are 'without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the Universe'.

THE AMBIGUITIES OF EMPIRICISM

We stated at the outset that empiricism is first of all a theory of *knowledge*, not a theory of *being*. Locke's classical exposition of Empiricism is aptly called *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke says that he will not venture on 'the vast ocean of being'—although he cannot help diving into it now and then.

This conscious limitation of empiricist thought to epistemology alone was the source of its most serious weakness. Empiricism came into the world with an ineradicable birthmark—an inherent ambiguity. The empiricist is clear on the fact that all knowledge is based on experience, but he is not clear on two further questions: (a) what generates this experience? and (b) what are the things which experience informs us about?

Materialism, unlike empiricism, gives a direct answer to these two questions. It states that objective, physical being precedes animal and human sensation, perception and knowledge. It insists that all the 'furniture' in man's mind comes from his interactions and connexions with the social and natural environments. Materialism insists upon the *unity* of objective being and subjective thought.

Empiricism, as such, however, does not commit itself whole-heartedly on this crucial point. Locke defined knowledge as 'nothing but the perception of the connexion and agreement or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas'. This definition can be interpreted in two opposing ways. In this 'agreement' of which Locke speaks is taken to consist in the correspondence of ideas with their objects in the external world, that coincides with the materialist view. John Toland (1670-1722), a blunt and therefore embarrassing materialist disciple of Locke, drove this point home when he defined the basic principle of evidence in his philosophy as 'the exact conformity of our Ideas or Thoughts with their Objects, or the Things we think upon'.

If, however, this agreement is regarded merely as the harmony of ideas with one another or with sense-data which are self-enclosed and have no essential bonds with material reality, the door is left open for idealist conclusions.

Thus an inconsistency, an inconclusiveness, even a certain shiftiness is implanted in the very heart of the empirical philosophy. This makes it possible for empiricists to swing in either direction on this pivotal question of the relation between thought and being. That is also why empiricism by its very nature is a theory of knowledge particularly suited to individuals and social groupings, like the middle classes in bourgeois society, who are themselves inconsistent, unstable, caught between contending forces and unwilling to commit themselves decisively on decisive matters.

Here, for example, is another instance of the same

sort of ambiguity in Locke. He asked whether, when we have ideas in our minds, 'we can thence certainly infer the existence of anything without us which corresponds to that idea . . . whereof some men think there may be a question made'. Locke repudiated this suggestion implied in the question of the sceptics. He states in reply that there is a manifest difference between dreaming of being in a fire and actually being in it, and that in practical life we are certain of this difference and guide ourselves by it. Our knowledge is accurate and real, Locke teaches, and there is 'a conformity between our ideas and the reality of things'.

This is good materialist doctrine. At the same time, however, Locke holds that the knowledge derived sensation is inferior in certainty and clarity to that knowledge which is presumably obtained through the superior channel of demonstration and intuition. According to him, we are intuitively aware of what spirit, the soul and God are, but have no clear idea of material substance. The latter 'is merely the something, we know not what . . . the supposed, but unknown support of those qualities we find existing'. This 'we know not what' is the seed out of which Kant's theory of the unknowable thing-in-itself grew and nineteenth century agnosticism ('we know not if') emerged.

THE SOCIAL SOURCE OF LOCKE'S INCONSISTENCIES

Locke's writings are filled with such inconsistencies and they are lamented by many critics as the source of confused thought and of the weakness of his ideological structure. His critics are right here, but these self-same commentators fail to grasp the historical source and the *class necessity* of this evasiveness. It was inevitable that Locke should have developed a theory with inconsistencies of this type since only in this way could he effectively serve the English bourgeoisie. What was weakness from the viewpoint of formal symmetry of doctrine was strength in the service of rising capitalism.

It has been well observed: 'Locke's theory of knowledge reveals that quality which his philosophy shares with the Church of England and perhaps other English things, its power to comprehend in a vague synthesis principles really belonging to opposite schools of thought.'[2] This 'English' quality is basically bourgeois in origin. It is equally prominent in the governmental organization of England which crowned the seventeenth century bourgeois revolutions. What an incongruous yet ingenious combination of institutions derived from different ages this State structure was—and so remains to this very day. The Monarchy, the Established Church and a House of Lords, all carried over from feudalism and every one subordinated to the sovereignty of the House of Commons, the prime institution of bourgeois parliamentarism!

Locke's thought exhibits similar mixtures of contraries. These constitute the distinctive quality of his philosophy. It must be remembered that he was the principal ideologist of the *victorious* bourgeois revolution in England—a revolution which ended in a compromise between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy and which sought to consolidate its positions rather than move forward to higher ground. Locke as an ideologist was called upon to *reconcile* the conflicting claims of Christianity and practical philosophy, of divine revelation and bourgeois reason, of the existence of a State Church with the toleration of nonconformist sects, of the King with Parliament, of traditional beliefs with new discoveries and progressive ideas, of the rights of man with the demands of private property. It would have been impossible to satisfy fully both sides and maintain consistency.

Locke, for example, is regarded as the architect of religious tolerance in England. Yet he refused to grant freedom of worship and thought to Catholics on the one side and atheists on the other because these extremes were repugnant to the new bourgeois régime.

Locke did not hesitate to sacrifice theoretical consistency for the sake of arriving at practical compromises and ideological combinations that gained his ends! He believed that principles should not be the master but the servant of practical necessity. Is not the English crown Presbyterian in Scotland and Episcopal in England? This was the very spirit of the British bourgeoisie of Locke's epoch, and even later periods of British history. No wonder that Locke became the favourite philosopher of conciliators and compromisers, the patron saint of liberalism and the apostle of 'the middle way'.

Thus the dualisms inherent in empiricism derive historically from the difficult position of the British bourgeoisie who fought against the feudalists on the one side and were hard-pressed by the plebeians on the other. The needs of the struggle against the old order gave a radical sharpness to empiricism (and even a revolutionary impulse to its later influence in America and France) while fear of the lower classes blunted the edge of its criticism and restrained its representatives from going all the way in their theoretical expressions and practical conclusions.

Subsequently this very indefiniteness of empirical philosophy appealed to those thinkers, especially those connected with the petty bourgeoisie, who were caught in similar social contradictions. The empiricists are the philosophical incarnation of Bunyan's character 'Mr Facing-Both-Ways'—a character not unknown in Britain today.

(To be Continued)

[2]B. Willey, **The Seventeenth-Century Background** (1934), pp. 274-5.

Correction

There was a misplaced line on page 173 of the last issue of LABOUR REVIEW. Lines 11 to 9 from the bottom of Column 2 should have read:

'. . . and might well jib at a third phase of opportunist manoeuvring. Moreover, as recently as February he had criticized the weakness of . . .'

Communications

Contradictions in Freud

JOHN McLEISH'S most interesting article in your last issue does not, to my mind, bring out sufficiently the contradictory nature of Freud's contribution to modern thought.

The philosophy of Freudism is partly materialist. But because it utilizes certain unverified and unverifiable hypotheses (the death instinct, the pleasure principle etc.), its conclusions are at times absurd. If a man has one wooden leg it is not surprising that he should limp.

Freudism is scientific in so far as it proclaims that thoughts are not accidental, that they are the effects of certain causes and that their roots are to be found in man himself. It refuses to consider them the ethereal products, in the minds of men, of the ministration of some supernatural agency. Freudism is also scientific when it proclaims that the bases of human belief may not be immediately apparent, that the mind is organized in many layers, some closer to consciousness than others, and that 'unconscious' material may powerfully influence both thought and action, at times erupting into consciousness itself. Freud's concept of the unconscious layers of the mind, and his provision of tools (such as idea-association and dream-analysis) for exploring this region, must rank among the greatest achievements of modern psychology. Where Freud is completely unscientific however is in his arbitrary and unproven assertions concerning the determinants of man's thought. Here speculation, myth and rationalizing reign supreme. It is as if Copernicus, having proved the earth to revolve around the sun, had proceeded to postulate devils to do the job!

Trotsky, in his letter of September 27, 1923, to the Russian physiologist Pavlov and in certain other writings, contrasted the scientific and speculative methods of investigating psychological mechanisms. He compared Pavlov's method (based on neurology and a rigidly scientific analysis of conditioned reflexes) to that of a diver who in order to explore a well puts on a diving suit, descends to the bottom, carefully explores the ground and walls, continuing his examination as he gradually comes up to the surface. The method of Freudism, he states, is that of conjecture. The examiner sits at the top of the well and, with a piercing gaze, attempts through the mass of murky and ever-moving water to discern the nature of the ground beneath.

Freud is scientific and materialist only in so far as he assumes that the 'well' of the human mind can be explored, that it is of finite proportions and that he rejects all idealist notions about the bottomless 'abyss of the soul'.

Swansea **George Atkins**

The Thunderer Regrets

BRITISH society is made up of a large, propertyless majority ruled over and exploited by a small rich majority. This is a fact well-known to readers of Labour Review. One of the methods, however, by which the minority maintain their power over the majority is to try to persuade the majority that it is untrue.

That is why they are afraid of reality, of what they call 'material interest'. They find it increasingly difficult to advance any kind of consistent argument for their position and that is why they are afraid of philosophical ideas, of what they call 'doctrines'. At popular festivals such as Christmas the majority are disposed to think well of everyone and this is a favourite occasion for the minority's sermonizing. The minority are accustomed to regarding God as their staunch friend and ally; because men used to believe that they were all equidistant from God, they would be induced to ignore the wide gaps between themselves. Regretfully the minority nowadays recognize that the religious argument no longer carries much weight in what they call a 'progressive and secular civilization'; recently they have tried to enlist sociologists into their organization but they are not certain whether or not they are really any use.

Here, for example, is the cracked but authentic voice of 'the Establishment' pealing out uncertainly from the leader columns of The Times on Christmas Eve 1957.

> 'Society is not in its nature a simple unit; it is a complex of lesser units each of which has not only its own material interests but its own consciousness expressed sometimes in a distinctive code of manners.'

This is a fairly straightforward statement. It does not take us very far. One might quarrel with the use of the word 'consciousness' in this context. It is accurate enough as a first description. But already the leader-writer has seen an awkward problem on his left flank which he would prefer to ignore. He brings up his tame sociologists to provide some covering fire while he tries to infiltrate. Are the 'material interests' of the units compatible? Will not the conceding of greater equality lead to the complete supersession of the minority's rule? But already he is in full retreat.

It is more convenient to assume that these 'lesser units' have not in fact got common material interests. Have not the sociologists defined the middle class as 'those English people who regard themselves as members of the middle class'? Hopefully he asserts that the idea of a social hierarchy in which each man has his appointed place is deeply ingrained in England (The Times is honest; it makes no pretence of any concern with Scotland, Ireland or Wales) and can survive 'even the achievement of a large measure of real equality'. But what is 'real' equality which has nothing to do with 'material interests'? Perhaps the sociologists have defined this too!

By extension from the case of the English middle classes, the leader-writer goes on to assume that all the lesser units (it seems that he includes the proletariat among these) are merely 'people who suppose themselves to occupy the same rung of the ladder' and who 'tend to come together for play'. They resemble one another in dress, speech and behaviour; but, again he reassures himself, these things are not after all important, they are like the code signs of children's gangs.

Still whistling manfully, he goes on to claim that these marks of distinction (i.e., between the ruling minority and the subject majority) are 'innocent'. That is to say, they are not consciously directed towards the overthrow of the minority's rule. They are even 'salutary' (they positively help to maintain that rule). Here panic enters the mind of the leader-writer. In a wild mixture of metaphors we learn that sectional allegiances are the 'cement' of society when they are 'purely cultural in the broadest sense of the word', whatever this may mean. But when these same allegiances cease merely to be 'cement' and begin to acquire the status of edifices with 'material or doctrinal foundations' (read here 'real' and 'philosophical') they tend to destroy society.

What on earth is the poor old Thunderer worried about? The vague awareness of not being liked is beginning to trouble the 'Establishment', it seems. Some rude people have been writing frivolous books in which the marks of 'upper class origin' are satirized. The 'simple-minded' have been reading

these books and they are no longer impressed with the moral, cultural and social superiority of their betters. Even though the proletariat has no 'material or doctrinal' foundation for its existence, it has the ill-bred presumption to be 'sincerely convinced of its own moral superiority'. May not this be the beginning of the end for the minority? May there not come a time when the proletariat will establish its physical superiority also?

Perish the thought! The leader-writer of The Times (can it have been Sir William Haley himself preaching this Christmas sermon?) looks back, not 'in anger', but with regret to the days when the 'simple-minded' still had a sense of duty, when they touched their caps to the squire and his relations and kept their proper stations.

The two elements which help to maintain the hierarchical society are 'a sense of duty' and 'pride'. The 'simple-minded' have lost the former, unfortunately, and the latter has swollen to alarming proportions. How can they be persuaded to recognize something which is 'honest and of good report' in whatever setting they find it, i.e., among the upper class? Coming so soon after the Bank Rate Tribunal this is what the Americans call 'a good question'. And the poor old lady of Printing House Square knows that there is no real answer to it. So after all, perhaps there is no substitute for religion, 'a common dependence on God's mercy' as a unifying force in society. Or perhaps someone has told her about the proletariat and its historical function.

Leeds **Frank Girling**

Book Reviews

Pacifist 'Realism'

Is Peace Possible?, by Kathleen Lonsdale (Penguin Books, 2s. 6d.)

PROFESSOR LONSDALE is a Quaker and an atomic scientist of renown and great ability. This earnest and very sincere book—the product of one who, as she says in her Foreword, 'feels a sense of corporate guilt and responsibility that scientific knowledge should have been so misused'—is a pacifist's attempt to give what she calls a 'realistic' answer to the greatest problem of our generation: how can the world live without the H-bomb?

Professor Lonsdale's righteous anger against the madmen who continue to play great power politics with H-bombs, guided missiles and the whole range of modern frightfulness, is all times evident behind her consciously restrained writing, a fact which makes her book all the more gripping. Her first six chapters make valuable reading. In these, and in some later chapters also, with all the elegance of a mathematical proof, she states the dilemma posed by the division of the world into independent national States and power blocs at a stage of scientific, technical and population growth which makes world planning and the elimination of all artificial barriers to the growth of industrial and agricultural production an absolute necessity. With the direct and simple logic of the natural scientist, she conveys the information available on the short and long-term effects of nuclear bombs and dissects the pompous inanities of such institutions as Civil Defence. For example on evacuation she writes:

> 'If a dozen such bombs [rigged H-bombs] were strategically dropped on the British Isles, there would be no place to go. The pasture would be radioactive, the vegetation would be radioactive, the cows' milk would be radioactive, the buildings would be radioactive. To spend millions on Civil Defence in the face of such facts is so fantastically stupid that one wonders who is making a good thing out of it. That, and that alone, would make sense.'

This last remark shows that Professor Lonsdale is not only a scientist but also has a very good supply of horse sense. Even when she comes to the sections where her science leaves her for pious wishful thinking, her horse sense, like her innate cheerfulness, will keep on breaking through.

Yet though she seems well aware of some of the economic causes of war, Professor Lonsdale cannot bring herself to denounce capitalism as the cause of war. Basically, according to her view, wars are caused by the failure of governments and peoples to act according to Christian moral standards. Her remedy for war accordingly consists of persuading individuals and even governments of 'goodwill' to persuade the governments and peoples of the world, by individualist and unilateral actions, that wars are not only morally wrong but from every point of view stupid, wasteful and ineffective. We have here in fact a modernized Christianized version of Sir Norman Angell's pre-1914 and still unheeded sermon, The Great Illusion. But has Professor Lonsdale ever sat down and, with the objectivity of a scientist, tried to answer the question—why do capitalist governments in spite of all rational exhortation consistently refuse to change their modes of behaviour—to give up war policies, to agree to disarm, to co-operate peacefully with all other nations? Is it sheer stupidity? Is it man's natural greed and wickedness? Or can it be that the behaviour of governments is determined by the objective laws operating within the various types of social systems—just as there are objective laws of physics which determine that a weighted block of wood will float on paraffin but sink in water? It is here, I suspect, that Professor Lonsdale consciously abandons her science and hands over to religious intuition. Take her example from another field of politics:

> 'It has been rightly pointed out that Britain gave up slavery just in time: before the industrial revolution. If slaves had become machine-minders, the abolition of slavery and of the slave-trade would have become more difficult by an order of magnitude. The fact that some other nations have not yet eliminated slavery did not prevent Britain from doing so once the wrongness of slavery had become apparent. We can engage in unilateral action even to our own disadvantage when our national conscience is touched.' (p. 110)

She goes on to say that we could do the same again about war 'once we realize the utter folly of our present way of action'. A slave operating modern industrial plants, indeed! Does Professor Lonsdale seriously believe that this was ever a technical possibility and that only moral fervour prevented it? There is a mountain of factual evidence pointing to the absolute necessity of converting slaves or serfs into 'free' proletarians before modern industrial machinery could ever be put into use. This is the explanation for Britain's anti-slavery crusade in the 19th century; the moral platitudes were mainly the propaganda form of this economic necessity. Similarly war, and the preparation for new wars, are the 'rational' mode of existence of imperialism.

In opposing war, moral sermons can, unfortunately, often be worse than useless. For if Professor Lonsdale's moral fervour succeeds in dissuading any worker from giving all his energies to fighting for international socalism, on the excuse that peace is a more urgent topic, she will have helped to preserve that very social order, modern imperialism, which so long as it remains will drive on to a solution of its difficulties in world war—H-bombs, radioactive dust, guided missiles, bacteria: the lot. I know that this is the last thing that Professor Lonsdale would wish to happen. I suggest. therefore, that what she needs, like all of us, is not less science but more science and particularly an enrichment of the social science whose chief subject-matter is how capitalism can be destroyed—and with it the real causes of war.

J.M.

Radiation Hazards

The Atomic Age and our Biological Future, by H. V. Brondsted (Watts, 9s. 6d.)

THIS little book presents for the non-technical reader the views of a modern 'neo-Darwinian' geneticist on the dangerous effects which increases in hard X-ray radiation may have upon future generations of mankind. It is a sober book and its conclusions are certainly on the side of the angels. Any government should very seriously weigh the probable effects of increased radiation, whether from H-bomb tests or from atomic power units, upon succeeding generations. Professor Brondsted shows that evidence exists for believing that the rate of genetic mutation (i.e., the appearance of inheritable changes in sperms and eggs) increases in proportion to the total quantity of radiation received and that, in **human** societies, which protect all their young, fit and unfit alike. harmful mutations will be more likely to survive than harmless advantageous ones.

I agree with the conclusions but would not follow Professor Brondsted far in his explanations.

'Accidental' mutations which increase in frequency as a result of radiation seem to me to have become less 'accidental' as a result of this discovery, i.e., it is not only mutation frequency which is changed by hard X-rays but also mutation character. Accordingly I would prefer to say that increased radiation causes harmful mutations. The point is not without practical importance. Some unscrupulous fascist-minded politician (definitely not Professor Brondsted) could argue from this classical Mendelian theory that increased radiation would improve the human race—so long as the harmful mutations (babies who are born deformed, blind, mentally-defective and so on) were destroyed. The frightfulness of this suggestion does not prove the falsity of the theory behind it, but so long as alternative genetical theories remain experimentally unconfirmed, I personally shall choose to believe the more humanitarian one.

But an excellent book nevertheless.

J.C.

Mission to Sheffield

Church and People in an Industrial City, by E. R. Wickham, B.D. (Lutterworth Press, 30s.)

'GOD deliver us from a Church religiously determined to engage the world, without the intellectual capacity to speak intelligently to its real problems!' (p. 257)

It is in the spirit conveyed in these words that the Rev. E. R. Wickham, known in Sheffield as the Industrial Parson, has approached his work; and one must credit him with real determination to grapple with what he describes in the Introduction as 'the intractable and chronic nature of the missionary problem facing the Church in our modern society'. Having undertaken the task of evangelizing the workers of the great industries of Sheffield, Mr Wickham had to decide on making an historical-economic analysis of 'the estrangement of the population in general and of the working class in particular' from the Church. He has, in essence, arrived at the root of the problem. In the process he has uncovered a surprising amount of the local history of Sheffield. It could be the history of almost any great industrial community. It certainly makes one proud of the working class of one's native city.

In 1792 a certain Colonel de Lancey visited Sheffield. This gentleman was Deputy Adjutant General to the Secretary for War, and his views on the French Revolution were somewhat different from those of Sheffield people:

> 'At Sheffield . . . I found that the seditious doctrines of Paine and the factious people who are endeavouring to disturb the peace of the country had extended to a degree very much beyond my conception . . .'

A local newspaper of 1793 asserts: 'Sheffield is stigmatized as being a seat of ignorance and disloyalty.' Samuel Roberts, a famous Sheffield silversmith, a social reformer, and Conservative in political views, writes in his autobiography that 'to many, even professed ministers of the Gospel, it [Tom Paine's 'Rights of Man'] appeared to become dearer than the Bible, and their visits to their flocks were made with the "Rights of Man" in their pockets, to induce them to read it'.

Mr Wickham has stumbled on the class struggle, but unfortunately the facts he has learned are in conflict with his fundamental beliefs. He traces the 'estrangement', from the English Revolution of 1640, through the struggles of religious workers with the fee-paying pew holders, and even shows how the Chartists were held out of Sheffield Cathedral by 'police . . . at the Church gates with cutlasses, and only "decently dressed individuals" were allowed to pass'!

Engels is quoted as writing in his 'Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844' that 'among the masses there prevails almost universally a total indifference to religion'. One cannot help but think that the truth of this dictum in 1957 is precisely the reason for the work of Mr Wickham, and indeed for the writing of this sincere and well documented survey.

Conversations with various working men in the Sheffield factories seem to indicate that, despite all the sincerity and hard work of Mr Wickham and his associates, the results will be similar to those of the Worker-Priests in France, and that in 2044 Engels' dictum—for the reasons he and Marx gave—will be truer than ever.

HENRY MARTIN

King and Commons

King and Commons 1660-1832, by Betty Kemp (Macmillan, 16s.)

THIS book is an attempt to summarize and define the constitutional relationship between the King and the House of Commons in the period from the Restoration to the Great Reform Act. The author traces the subtle changes in this relationship through these stages—a period of unease, ending with the years of the Revolution Settlement, during which the foundations of a stable relationship were laid; a period of balance and co-operation between the two powers, between 1716 and 1784; and a period of further change in which the balance was undermined and finally, in 1832, destroyed. The thesis of

the book is straightforward, well worked out and admirably clear. There is a particularly illuminating chapter on the development of the Cabinet and the emergence of the Prime Minister.

Constitutional history is a highly academic field of study, and does not really begin to make sense unless the student refers continually to the political struggles of the time, the ideas, the issues, the social realities with which the King and Commons were concerned and of which they were a part. It is a defect of many works concerned with constitutional history that they virtually ignore the political basis of constitutional practice—and unfortunately this book is no exception. To experts in the period this will appear, perhaps, a minor fault, since they can supply the background for themselves and make their own estimates of the validity of the author's generalizations. Readers less expert—history students or school-teachers—will find difficulty in the formal treatment of the theme, the abstract and turgid style and the omission of history itself. This is a pity, for the book is otherwise competent and scholarly.

K. R. ANDREWS

Class and Education

Social Class and Educational Opportunity, by J. E. Floud, A. H. Halsey and F. M. Martin (Heinemann, 12s. 6d.)

EDUCATIONAL research is, unfortunately, all too frequently merely the rediscovery of the obvious. This study, carried out in the prevailing Fabian climate of the London School of Economics, achieves this same objective. Nevertheless it surveys a useful piece of work and its results are presented with a crispness which goes well with the excellently presented and probably reliable statistical tables.

Our present-day grammar schools became part of the national education system as a result of the 1902 Education Act, which had the declared object of providing advanced secondary education to the children of the middle classes. At the close of the nineteenth century, the expansion of British imperialist administrative machinery and the growing competition in the world market of German products (most of which were being produced in modernized factories using up-to-date scientific know-how) caused the British ruling class considerable alarm. They soon began to worry about the short supply of middle-strata technicians and administrators. The new grammar schools came into existence to satisfy this shortage, while at the same time, by marrying the new schools with the traditions of Victorian upper-class education, they ensured that the products of these schools would be so indoctrinated with bourgeois values as to be 'safe men' for imperialism.

The number of children in secondary grammar schools steadily expanded during the first part of this century so that by 1938, in many areas, as many as 15 per cent. of all the children were attending this type of school. But there was little social equality about these grammar schools. In Middlesbrough in 1938, for example, 16 per cent. of the pupils in grammar schools were children of 'professional workers, business owners and managers', while 46 per cent. were children of 'manual workers'.

Yet, because the working class is by far the largest class numerically,

> '. . . despite the expansion of the secondary school system and the greatly increased proportion of pupils who had won total or partial remission of fees in competition, class inequalities in educational opportunity had not been reduced to the extent generally supposed. There were, of course, far more children from families low in the occupational scale entering secondary schools at the end of the period covered by the enquiry than there had been at the beginning; and almost all held free places. Yet their number was still far from proportionate to their strength in the population. The chances of obtaining even a **free** place in a secondary school were shown to be greater at the top of the occupational scale than at the bottom. These facts could be fully explained only if they could be related to the social distribution of intelligence, and if the extent to which social factors influencing the process of selection for secondary education were known'. (p. xvii)

The present work starts from this point and inquires whether the 1944 Education Act which, except for the 'public schools' and 'direct grant grammar schools', abolished fees and which was hailed by many reformists in the Labour movement as the final achievement of a democratic education system because now every child was supposed to have 'equality of opportunity', has equalized the opportunity of workers' children with those of the children of the rich. Unfortunately for the Fabian panegyrists, the main product of this 'democratic advance' was—the hated 11-plus examination.

Is it true that as a result of the 1944 Education Act the class structure of the grammar schools has changed and given equal opportunity for full secondary education to the children of the working class? This book provides the answer and gives the evidence. No—it is not true.

I quoted as an example above the percentages of children of two social classes who in 1938 were entering the Middlesbrough grammar school. By comparison, in 1953, 23 per cent. of the pupils were sons of 'professional workers, business owners and managers', while 44 per cent. were children of 'manual workers'. It will be seen that the result of the 1944 Act has been to increase the advantages of the children of the ruling class.

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Taking Middlesbrough again as an example, in 1954 64 per cent of the children of the 'professional workers, business owners and managers' went to the municipal grammar schools and of course many of the remaining 36 per cent. went to private schools. A mere 12 per cent. of workers' children in this same year entered the Middlesbrough grammar schools. There is hardly 'equality of opportunity' here.

The answer which the Ministry pundits give to these facts is: 'Ah—the upper class children, on the average, inherit greater "natural intelligence" from their parents and so do better in the 11-plus selection examination.' Unfortunately, although this book does go on to make an analysis of the class distribution of intelligence quotients derived from the so-called intelligence tests, it does not even begin to uncover how the roots of class privilege in education have been built into these things called 'intelligence tests'. Perhaps the London School of Economics will next turn its attention to this.

JOHN DANIELS

Biography of Bessie

Bessie Braddock, MP, by Millie Toole (Robert Hale, 18s.)

DO you yearn for a cosy cup of tea in the company of Mrs Bessie Braddock? If you do (and it is not one of my ambitions) then Miss Millie Toole has written just the book for you. For this is the record of innumerable cups of tea and tête-a-têtes at number two Zig-Zag Road, Liverpool.

Approximately 120 of its 219 pages are a sickeningly eulogistic account of Big Bessie's life and works as Labour MP for the Exchange Division of Liverpool. Her kindness, her tirelessness, her devotion to the cause—yes, even her good looks!—are all rubbed mercilessly into the reader's protesting brain.

And yet there is virtue in Miss Toole's blundering book. Its sycophancy, its repetitiveness, its misprints and grammatical mistakes, can all be forgiven. Forgiven for the hundred-odd pages that are NOT devoted to Bessie.

Those hundred-odd pages in the early part of the book cover the rousing story of Bessie's fighting mother, Ma Bamber, and her battles against the grinding poverty of pre-1914 Liverpool. They record the grim history of the Unemployed Workers' Committee in the nineteen twenties, and tell the story of Liverpool's amazing people, bluntly refusing to accept their lot in the city's teeming slums.

Bessie is only a pale shadow flitting among giants in this part of the book. She played her part along with hundreds of others in a class battle that has had few equals for ferocity anywhere in Britain. And Miss Toole's galloping, breathless style is well-tuned to the telling of it.

Her picture of the grim miseries of the parish-coupon poor. of the gaunt, prematurely aged Liverpool mothers meeting the arrival of more mouths to feed with 'another cup of water in the scouse', is angrily painted. And she can be hilariously funny in her account of how the army of unemployed workers fooled the police and affronted 'respectable' Liverpool citizens with demonstrations that could only have been staged with Liverpool's brand of Irish audacity.

Those first hundred pages are genuine working-class history, and well worth the time it takes to read them. But, oh, the rest of the book!

How can Miss Toole tell with such relish the outrageous details of Bessie's rebel days—particularly her years in the newly-founded Communist Party—and still give the stamp of approval to her ruthless political orthodoxy since 1951?

How can she reconcile the fact that Bessie quit the Communist Party because it left no room for independent thought, yet lived to invoke 'party loyalty and discipline' to crush the Bevanite rebellion in her own constituency?

Miss Toole offers no direct answer. Yet the answer is implicit in her book. Those rousing early pages show where her heart lies. She should have stopped there.

JOHN LAUCHLAN

Child of Thermidor

Child of the Revolution, by Wolfgang Leonhard
(Collins, 25s.)

IN these memoirs, first published in western Germany in 1955, Mr Leonhard portrays the uncertainties of existence among the middle strata of the Soviet bureaucracy, a milieu in which he spent the most formative decade of his life. That he emerged virtually unscathed from this experience is a tribute to his tactical shrewdness . . . and a testimony to the fact that if not unduly encumbered by principles or theory a man may survive in the most hostile of environments.

Leonhard's mother was a personal friend of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, a member of the illegal Spartakusbund, a member of the German Communist Party from 1918 and the author of a book, published in 1921, on revolutionary literature in Germany during the war years. She visited the Soviet Union in the difficult days of 1924 and returned to Germany, where she continued underground work after the Nazis came to power. In 1935 she escaped to Sweden, where, with the help of Soviet ambassadress Alexandra Kollontai, she obtained permission to settle in the USSR with her 13-year-old son. Impeccable credentials, one would have thought. Unfortunately this was the era of Stalin's henchmen, and a revolutionary past could almost guarantee a visit to Vorkuta. She was arrested during the first wave of the purges, for alleged 'counter-revolutionary Trotskyite activity', and spent the next twelve years in various concentration camps. When freed in 1948 she described her experiences in a moving book, 'A Quarter of My Life'.

Young Wolfgang entered politics through a very different door. His formative years were spent in the sheltered atmosphere of the 'apparatus'. He was fed Stalinism as others are fed porridge—and thrived on it. His career in the USSR proceeded, with only minor jolts, along the path of conformism. It provides a text-book account of the formation of a party bureaucrat.

Leonhard first stayed at a special home in Moscow for the children of German émigrés. This home 'had nothing in common with the usual children's homes in the Soviet Union', the inmates being 'almost as highly privileged as members of a delegation on a conducted tour'. He attended the Karl Liebknecht day school (which unexpectedly closed down in 1938, following the arrest of most of its teaching staff). He joined the Young Pioneers and later the Komsomol. When, in September 1941, the German political émigrés were suddenly rounded up and sent en masse to Karaganda in central Asia, young Leonhard decided to travel with them (having first secured, by various manoeuvres, a certificate exempting him from compulsory deportation). His special permit saved him from the extreme hardships endured by the other German anti-fascists and deportees. He talked his way out of the settlements, proceeded to the Educational Institute of the nearest town, and continued his studies. He even established a position for himself in the local organization responsible for political émigrés! In June 1942 he was selected to attend the Comintern School at Ufa, in the Bashkir republic.

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Leonhard escaped the rigours of the war. His progress after the dissolution of the Comintern School in May 1943 was quite impressive. He was installed at the Lux Hotel in Moscow, where he worked for the National Committee for Free Germany. After the collapse of the Wehrmacht he was among those specially chosen to fly to Berlin with Ulbricht, in April 1945, there to set up a provisional administration. He worked for the occupying authority, and with the secretariat of the Socialist Unity Party, and must have been deemed reliable, for in 1947 he was appointed instructor at the Karl Marx Party Academy at Liebenwalde, near Berlin. In 1949 he broke with orthodox Stalinism and escaped to Yugoslavia, where he spent nearly two years, writing and broadcasting for Tito. His ire expened, he then settled in the West.

Throughout the period of his rise in the 'apparatus' young Leonhard kept his eyes wide open, his wits about him and his mouth shut. He made many shrewd observations and it is these rather than his attempts at interpretation—that give his book its unusual value. How does a Stalinist functionary rationalize his disagreements and reservations? How are isolated criticisms prevented from connecting and giving an understanding of the system as a whole? These are important points for those who would save for Marxism the best elements in the Communist Parties.

Leonhard tells us of his first impressions on reaching the Soviet Union in 1935—the intense, spontaneous interest of young people in politics, their eagerness to study and their wish to understand. He mentions his surprised discovery, within a few months, of the 'blotted-out paragraphs' in books and journals—even in the publications of foreign Communist Parties. He tells of his mother's sudden disappearance in October 1936, of the dissolution without explanation of the Society of Old Bolsheviks, of the growing tempo of the purges, of the arrests of several of his teachers and even of some of his teen-age schoolmates, of the atmosphere of terror. He describes the attempts of the young people, without books or documents, to assess the social causes of the crisis, to look beyond the official explanations, to see the elimination of the Leninist Old Guard in some kind of historical perspective. He mentions the secret discussions about Jacobinism and 1793. He tells of the effect upon him of first reading, at this time, John Reed's 'Ten Days that Shook the World'.

One of the most revealing parts of the book is the account of the intensive indoctrination Leonhard received at the

Comintern School during 1942 and 1943. If any reader of Labour Review doubts the consciously counter-revolutionary nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the way it miseducates the youth, he should make a particular study of these passages. In this section Leonhard also describes how he surreptitiously read a copy of the American Trotskyist journal The Militant, discovered while sorting out some Comintern archives. He states he 'could not have been more startled if [he] had found a packet of dynamite' but that he read on, despite the guard outside the door, 'for the Trotskyists wrote in our own language using our own terminology and were dealing with things about which I had already had doubts of my own'.

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A remarkable close-up of Stalinism in action is provided by his account of what happened following the entry of the Red Army into Berlin. Anti-fascist committees had arisen more or less spontaneously in many areas, committees of overwhelmingly proletarian composition and often inspired by former rank-and-file members of the German Communist Party. They were all bureaucratically dissolved. However vigorous or healthy the initiative from below, the appointment of the local administration had to proceed according to the prescriptions of the apparatchiks. In many cases, specific instructions were issued to appoint bourgeois officials. Leonhard describes a search for this sort of political animal. among the ruins and chaos of East Berlin. He gives a well-documented account of the conflict between the old class-conscious communist cadres and the generation of Moscow-trained 'professionals'. The manoeuvres behind the formation of the Socialist Unity Party are exposed. Several years later Leonhard came to see that all this was no constellation of misguided policies but that 'it was impossible for Stalinism to permit the creation by independent initiative from below of anti-fascist, socialist or communist movements or organizations, because there was the constant danger that such organizataions would escape its control and try to resist directives issued from above'.

Yet for all its interest one is left, on finishing the book, with a sense of something missing. Here is a volume of 430 pages devoted to the day-to-day life of the greatest 'communist' party in the world. And yet at no place in the narrative does one even sense the existence of the Russian working class. There is only an enormous network of functionaries. From time to time, it is true, there are hints of shadows in the background, barefoot children in the streets of Leningrad in 1935, helpless deportees in Karaganda, an angry peasant woman near Ufa complaining of the people's hunger and contrasting it with the life of students and officials of the Comintern school. But these are isolated occurrences, intrusions from another world into the sequence of discussion, doctrine, dogma and double-talk which seem to make up the intellectual life of the party official.

That Leonhard defected is not surprising. He had brains and they must finally have rushed to his head. Unlike his predecessors Petrov and Kravchenko he did not desert to the flesh-pots of the West. But neither, unfortunately, did he quench his thirst at the source, and follow the example of Ignace Reiss. It is doubtful if he has grasped as yet the full meaning of the workers' struggle.

GRACCHUS

Why No New Ideas?

Documents of Modern Political Thought, ed. T. E. Utley and J. Stuart Maclure (Cambridge University Press, 22s. 6d.)

THESE extracts from the authentic texts of various schools of political philosophy will be of limited, though definite, value to university tutors and students, as well as to those who conduct political education among working men and women.

Following Oakeshott (whose neo-Tory opportunism has replaced the reformist opportunism of Laski at the London School of Economics), are grouped political ideas into five schools. These are: representative democracy, communism, catholicism, fascism and protestantism. Obviously current fashion has influenced not only the whole plan of the book but the selections themselves.

The material on communism starts well, with the' Communist Manifesto' and pieces from 'Capital' and 'Anti-Dühring', and from Lenin. Thereafter it sadly falls off. In their introductory note the editors justify the inclusion of Lenin's 'Two Tactics of Social-Democracy', written in 1905. They do not seem to know that Lenin's 'April Theses' and his whole activity in 1917 constitute a fundamental advance on his 1905 position, in the direction of Trotsky's 'theory of permanent revolution'. While Lenin in 1905 was still thinking that the proletariat would lead a purely bourgeois revolution, Trotsky had already in that period, charted the road the 1917 revolution was actually to take. 'Results and Prospects' argued that the proletariat would itself carry through the democratic tasks, through the agency of soviet power, which the bourgeoisie was already too belated to achieve. The Marxist position could have been much better put by extracts from Lenin's 1917 writings or from Trotsky's 'Permanent Revolution' or 'History of the Russian Revolution'.

Recently out-dated fashion may also be the explanation why the editors take as good coin what the Stalinists said about themselves. We find here Stalin's apology of 1939 for the failure of the bureaucracy to wither away ('capitalist encirclement'), confusing symptoms with causes. We find Khrushchev's wishful thinking about 'peaceful competition of social systems' and 'transforming Parliament from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of the people's will'. This is presented as good Marxism. How we miss a good extract—there are hundredso available—on the role of soviets as the mass organizations for taking and administering political power in a socialist revolution as the Bolsheviks conceived it.

The great Henri Pirenne, historian of the Middle Ages, said of the years of the decline of feudalism (1300-1450): 'Everywhere the world was in labour, but it produced only abortive births.' In this collection we have scholasticism, and no new ideas. The only ideas which could not have been included in such a collection thirty years ago express confusion, despair and the limited objective of keeping things from getting any worse for the existing social order.

R. SHERWOOD

Sterile Economics

The Theory of Wage Determination, ed. John T. Dunlop (Macmillan, 36s.)

THE epitaph on this learned compilation might well be 'marking time'. With formidable academic trappings, a group of the orthodox settled into a hotel by Lake Lucerne in 1954 to study how modern developments, the operations of government and of mass trade unions, the pressures of advanced sections of the working class and the pressures of inflation under full employment have altered wage-bargaining

The spectre which haunts the writers is the working class itself. How long and how persuasively can the 'authorities', including the trade union leaders, sell 'wage restraint'? A French contributor, Brichier, shows how the communist bureaucrats in the leadership of the CGT accepted wage restraint after 1945 just like the British TUC.

But there is nothing here to guide either governments or militant workers. The leading ideas were being foreshadowed in the nineteen twenties; all that is new is the terminology and the form of the argument. **T. MARSHALL**

. . . is a journal of Marxist theory and practice. Its aims are threefold. It seeks to spread an understanding of all aspects of Marxism. It studies the experiences of the working-class movement at all periods and in all countries, so that the lessons of the workers' struggle can be assimilated and the proper conclusions drawn. It applies Marxism creatively to the present-day problems of the British Labour movement.

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